Arabic and English Adjectival Systems in Translation: Agreement Intricacies

Dr. Ehab Saleh Abdo Annuzaili

Abstract:
The vast grammatical schism between the adjectival systems of (Modern Standard) Arabic and English reflects itself in translation. Despite inherent complexity, Arabic is a highly inflectional language with a rich system of concatenation, hence narrowing the possibility of structural ambiguity a translator may face. In Arabic, the agreement rules between adjectives and nouns – i.e. gender, number, case and (in)definiteness – serve as internalized codes that help translators to decipher or remove any potential ambiguity. By contrast, English does not dance on the same agreement-rules tune of Arabic, resulting sometimes in ambiguous case which should be handled in translation, particularly from English into Arabic. Apart from structural issues, particular differences in the adjectival systems of both languages entail that the translator should resort to various techniques in order to maintain correctness of content and lucidity of expression in the translation language (TL).

Keywords: adjective, translation, agreement, case, number, gender, (in)definiteness.

Abbreviations: SL/ST (Source Language / Source Text); TL/TT (Target Language / Target Text); NOM (nominative); ACC (accusative); GEN (genitive); SING (singular); PL (plural); MAS (masculine); FEM (feminine); DEF (definite); INDEF (indefinite).

The more humans think they understand a concept or a thing, the more sophistications they add to it for the purposes of giving it touches of uniqueness. The raison d'être of adjectives in a language stands as a tangible embodiment of this phenomenon. Although adjectives in a sentence materialize their potential only if there is an NP functioning as the head word/phrase, adjectives one way or the other modify how speakers/listeners or writers/readers perceive that specific NP. In the sentence “I love that really big old green antique CAR that always parked at the end of the street”, it is presumed that we first know what a ‘car’ normally is, but our car here is rather a specific one with a number of sophistications/complications that make it unique/specific for both parties of conversation. Therefore, one can safely observe that adjectives on the one hand add specifications to and elaborate on NP, and on the other hand modify our perception of NP.

# Assistant Professor of Applied Linguistics, English Department, College of Sciences and Arts (Muhayil Assir), King Khalid University, Muhayil Assir, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.
Semantically, the descriptive function performed by adjectives is a necessary part of any language so long as modification, elaboration, description and specification are necessary parts of humans’ linguistic needs and faculties.\(^1\) Of course, as pointed out above, for an adjective to be functional in a sentence, there must be a headword, an NP, whether explicit or implicit. If speakers of all languages had the same perspectives toward description of how they perceive reality, and if translation were merely the replacement of one form for another, adjectives would probably have become the best friends of a translator. Equivalence in the translation of some adjectives is sometimes a murky spot since even the dictionary or lexical meanings of some often thought of as equivalent adjectives remain relative and even far from being similar (Mansour 2010). The issue of adjectival systems of different languages is rather more complicated than it may deceptively appear, particularly between languages belonging to different language families, as is the case of Arabic (a Semitic language) and English (an Indo-European language) – apart from adjective-related translation problems which may arise from anthropological or epistemological differences. This paper is concerned mainly with the role of agreement in the translation of adjectives based on the grammatical description of the adjectival systems of (Modern Standard) Arabic and English, and is meant to shed light on issues of potential ambiguity a translator is prone to encounter while dealing with the translation of adjectives between Arabic and English.

Arabic traditional approaches to grammar classify words into three main categories: verb, noun and particle. Known in Arabic as ʂif\(\)at or ɳa\(\)f adjectives are considered the first, most important adjunct category of nouns.\(^2\) Traditional Arab grammarians defined adjective as an identifying term that is used to reflect an ‘ornament’ or ‘aspect’ of a noun.\(^3\) For an Arabic translator, the adjectival system of English encompasses a wide spectrum of functions that are sometimes classified in Arabic under different grammatical terms. Unless it serves a logical precept, the order of adjectives in English – i.e. arranged respectively, quantity or number; quality or opinion; size; age; shape; colour; proper adjective (often nationality, other place of origin, or material); and purpose or qualifier – matters less in Arabic. Based on the view of

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\(^2\) The other adjuncts of nouns include ʈaw\(\)kiid (emphatic forms), 3adtf (conjoining tools) and ḅadal (substitution).

information structure (Halliday 1976; Firbas 1966), Arabic sentence tends to bring old information at the beginning and goes on to reveal new information. Again, the thematic structure of Arabic (i.e. theme-rheme classification) reveals that while there is great similarity between Arabic and English, “Arabic has greater syntactic flexibility than English [does]: while English uses word order to determine the function of each word in a sentence, Arabic uses case markings and agreement to identify the grammatical functions of words and to distinguish topic-comment structures and focus structures” (Hassan 2015: 138). Generally, Arabic argument structure prefers to have each sentence hooked up to previous sentences using cohesion and/or coherence tools. By applying this view to the order of adjectives in Arabic, one would generally assume that, ideally, in adjectival strings the closer the adjective to the noun the more prominent. But to presume that this view is necessarily true in all circumstances would rather be an exaggerated overgeneralization.

The question of prominence vis-à-vis order of adjectives in adjectival strings in Arabic reflects the nature of the affinity an adjective has to its noun. There are mainly five cases:

1) when adjectives have equal prominence: e.g. in ‘a new and beautiful car’ both adjectives can exchange positions without a big change of meaning.

2) when certain collocations are preferred due to logical sequence or otherwise, yet with equal prominence: e.g. in ‘That man is old and wise’, it is a tradition to associate old age with wisdom. Old age brings wisdom. ‘Old’ happens and brings with it ‘wise’. Other collocational structures include, for example, ‘clean and tidy’, ‘nice and polite’.

3) in fixed expressions: e.g. in In the Name of Allah, Most Merciful, Most Gracious’ the exchange of position of adjectives may not affect the semantic level, but Arabs (and Muslims) may see it as a linguistic violation of a ‘sacred’ order of words. Some other attributes of Allah also follow specific order. Consider the following example from the Holy Koran in which the order of those adjectives (although preferred by Arabs to be considered as nouns) is traditionally non-violable, and in which Arabic adjectives are rendered as nouns.

هُوَ اللهُ الَّذِي لا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْمَلِكُ الْقُدُّوسُ السَّلَامُ الْمَحْمُودُ الْبَارِزُ الْخَيْبَاءُ الْمُهْيِمُ الْمُهْيِمُ الْمُهْيِمُ الْمُهْيِمُ السَّلَامُ الْمَلِكُ الْقُدُّوسُ اللهُ عَزَّ الْمَلِكُ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَمِيدُ الْمُهْيِمُ الْخَيْبَاءُ الْمَاشِيُّ الْمَاشِيُّ الْمَاشِيُّ اللهُ عَزَّ الْمَلِكُ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَمِيدُ الْمُهْيِمُ الْمُهْيِمُ الْمُهْيِمُ الْمُهْيِمُ السَّلَامُ الْمَلِكُ الْقُدُّوسُ

Allah is He, than Whom there is no other god:- the Sovereign, the Holy One, the Source of Peace (and Perfection), the Guardian of Faith, the Preserver of Safety, the Exalted in
4) when certain order is imposed as of necessity, as in colours: e.g., in 
أزرق فاتح ‘light blue’ and 
أزرق غامق ‘dark blue’.
5) when change of order can change meaning: e.g. in 
الكتاب الأخضر الفلسفي vs. الكتاب الفلسفي الأخضر ‘the revolutionary Green Book’ and ‘the green revolutionary book’ can refer to different entities.

The lack of gender-/number-/case-/(in)definiteness-based distinctions associated with English adjectival system may be valuable for a translator translating from Arabic into English, but problems of ambiguity loom in the textual horizons with respect to translating from English into Arabic, as is shown below. This, in fact, is the moot point this paper attempts to prove. In other words, the agreement rules (gender, number, case and (in)definiteness) endow the adjectival system of Arabic with more sophistication and clarity (as well as complications for novice non-native speakers of Arabic) for translators. Generally, the four agreement standards used here are Gender (masculine + feminine); number (singular, dual and plural), case (nominative, genitive and accusative), and the (in)definite.

Major similarities and dissimilarities between the adjectival systems of Arabic and English are highlighted below to put us in a good position to prove the hypothesis of this paper. In English, adjectives generally occur predictively (premodifiers: This is a smart boy’) or attributively (postmodifiers: ‘This boy is smart’). With respect to position, the tendency with the adjectival system of Modern Standard Arabic shows that adjectives can also occur attributively or as predicates. While attributive adjectives agree completely with their nouns in case and (in)definiteness, there exist a few intricacies regarding gender and number agreement, as is shown in later paragraphs. As for adjectives functioning as predicates in Arabic, no copula or link verb is required to link the noun and the adjective (such as the copula verb ‘is’ in ‘The boy is smart.’) because the connection between the noun and adjective(s) in a sentence is mainly perceived through agreement rules – e.g.  

الولد DEF+boy+SING+NOM
الولي al-walad-u NOM+SING
الثاني al-‘askari-u NOM+SING
الثالث al-khadder-u NOM+SING

This is the smart boy.

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Notice that Arabic is read from right to left.

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In the first example, the adjective functions merely as an attribute of the noun and shows agreement with the noun in all four respects. In the second example, the adjective functions as the sentence predicate. Adjectives functioning as predicates are always indefinite even if the subject is definite, but such adjectives agree with the subject in number, gender, and case. In Arabic, while attributive adjectives often occur immediately after their nouns (for semantic and/or stylistic reasons), adjectives used as predicates can occur a little far from their nouns. For example, there are two adjectives and a relative clause after the headword (NP) in this sentence: ذلك الطالب الهادئ الذي يجلس بجوار النافذة، but while the first adjective (underlined) is used attributively and occurs immediately after the noun, the second adjective (underlined and bold) serves as predicate and is separated from its noun by an attributive adjective and a relative clause without affecting its meaning or grammatical function.

In addition, Arabic also has adjectival constructs where the adjective comes prenominally (e.g. قوي البنية ‘strong-bodied’), but this usage is rather literary or formal and, generally speaking, such adjectival constructs function in sentences as attributes of other implicit or nouns or pronouns. Consider the following example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>القلب</th>
<th>طبيب</th>
<th>الرجل</th>
<th>هذا</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>al-qalb-i</td>
<td>taib-u</td>
<td>ar-radžul-u</td>
<td>haḍaa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEF+heart+MAS+SING+GEN</td>
<td>INDEF+kindly+MAS+SING+NOM</td>
<td>DEF+man+MAS+SING+NOM</td>
<td>this+MAS+SING+NOM</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This man is pure-hearted.

The adjective ‘kindly’ describes ‘heart’, and both words function as an adjectival construct describing the noun ‘man’. The same also applies to the following example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>الوجه</th>
<th>جميلة</th>
<th>امرأة</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>al-wadžh-i</td>
<td>džamiil-at-u</td>
<td>?imra-?at-un</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There is lack of unanimity in English grammar books as to the exact definition of adjectives. An oversimplified, sometimes even hazy, definition of the term ‘adjective’ would be that it is a term that gives “extra information about nouns” (Foley and Hall 2003: 217); “Adjectives are a large class of words (for example, good, bad, new, accurate, careful) which define more precisely the reference of a noun or pronoun” (Leech 2006: 6). While it is not the aim of this paper to indicate and/or criticize all definitions of adjectives as a part of speech, adjectives in English obviously encompass so many categories that are classified in Arabic grammar under nomenclatures other than the class of adjectives. The adjectival system of English subsumes not only descriptive terms (e.g. ‘hot’, ‘long’, ‘fragrant’, etc.) – or what we may call adjectives per se – but also articles, possessive adjectives, demonstratives, and quantifiers. Contrastively, the adjectival system of Arabic regards the first category only (i.e. adjectives per se) as adjectives: the other categories are respectively classified adwaat-ul-maʔrifati wa an-naʔikrati (definite/indefinite tools), ḏaʔamaʔir muttaʔsilaʔ (affixed pronouns), asmaaʔu-l ʔifaaraʔ (signaling names/tools), and tamyiz al-ʔadad (number identification; numerals).

Although one does agree that each language may be entitled to having its own way to express perceived material and conceptual worlds, there are always what appear to be commonalities and ‘universals’. Adjectives (and any expressions functioning as adjectives) emerge as a response to the need for modifying our perceptions and visualization of nouns (and pronouns, given that pronouns are more or less proforms of nouns). In translation, however, it seems even that the perception of certain adjectives varies from one language community to another – e.g. ‘cloudy’ or ‘rainy’ have optimistic meaning components in Arabic desert-based culture as opposed to, say, tropical cultures, although both the dictionary meanings of both adjectives are more or less the same. In other words, lexical conformity or dictionary meaning

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6 It is to be noted that in Arabic grammar, the words كل (koll; all), جميع (jamee3; every); كلا (kilaʔ/kiliʔa; both [masc./fem.]), etc. are classified as emphatic tools توكيد معنوي – also, like adjectives, a subcategory of nouns.
7 See Mansour, Salma. “Appraisal Emotional Adjectives in English/Arabic Translation: A Corpus Linguistic Approach”.
8 Compare also the adjective ‘sunny’ in northern parts of Europe and in Arabian desert.
parallelism of adjectives between languages may not be always ensured, and speakers of different languages may perceive certain adjectives differently at least in terms of nuances of meanings. The philosophical dimensions of the issue of relativity of meaning are far too complex and beyond the scope of this paper. The point most relevant to us here is that the huge differences in terms of definition and (semantic, grammatical, etc.) classification of adjectives between Arabic and English are just the top of the iceberg.

On the one hand, the vast schism of grammatical classification between the adjectival systems of Arabic and English may cause confusion to the translator. On the other hand, the classification of the adjectival system of English in its apparently too ‘flexible’ definition of the term ‘adjective’ must by implication open its arms to include also nouns describing other nouns, as is the case with compound nouns, which is a grey area for translators working between Arabic and English. At one level, this claim betrays the contradiction inherent in the traditional definition of the term ‘adjective’ in English; at another level, it also elevates the term ‘adjective’ to a mental as well as linguistic function (that of describing nouns), not restricted by form. A significant part of this paper has to do with this grey area, highlighting with examples (taken from real-life translation work) levels of ambiguity and difficulty that a translator is likely to encounter.

In addition to the above, difficulties in translating adjectives between Arabic and English may also arise from semantic, pragmatic, cultural and/or ontological levels. Semantically, for instance, borrowing can solve the problem of translating a ‘televised interview’ – i.e. interview’ – i.e. مقابلة متلفزة muqaabalatun mutalfazah. Culturally, the sensual connotation of a ‘sexy’ woman will be lost while translated into Arabic – the word جذابة (‘attractive’) is generally used as an equivalent term. Pragmatically, when someone grows old, his/her hair turns ‘grey’ in English and ‘white’ in Arabic. Ontologically, a ‘sunny’ ‘summer’ day in London or Scandinavian countries will never create the same joy in the heart of an Arab in the scorching heat of Arabian desert. When faced with such nuances and differences, a translator may sometimes feel obliged to enlighten TT recipient and point out such issues using various techniques available (e.g. bracketed explanatory notes within TT; footnotes; multiple words, etc.). Such issues may also include difficulties arising from the similar structure of some English adjectives with other parts

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9 The symbolism of the cloudy atmosphere in a novel, such as A Farwell to Arms by Hemingway, may not be appreciated by an Arab reader as effectively as it would be indicated by the translator.
of speech, namely adverbs (e.g. ‘a dead dog’ vs. ‘I’m dead sure of that’) and nouns (e.g. ‘the rich and the poor’; ‘the sole survivor who lost the sole of his left shoe’). Though essential, these, however, are not the central question this paper aims to discuss.

In linguistics, particularly semantics and syntax, two types of ambiguity are recognized: lexical (or semantic) and structural (syntactic).\(^\text{10}\) In the context of translation of adjectives, the word ‘light’ (adj.) is a good example of the first type: it can mean ‘not very heavy’ and ‘not very dark’ – of course, let alone its meaning as a noun. So are some other adjectives like ‘deep’, ‘dry’ and ‘hard’. Lexical ambiguity is a sort of sense equivocation as a result of multiple senses of a term, and is by far more common than structural ambiguity. In on-sight/spontaneous interpretation, lexical ambiguity also subsumes vagueness of sense arising from homonymous and polysemous expressions – e.g., “hard end” vs. “hardened”. Here, of course, time becomes a ruthless enemy for on-sight interpreters, but generally the translator’s (hence, interpreter’s) decision-making process (Levy 1967) must first of all be based on and resort to ST context for clues that can help disambiguate the sense and lead to appropriate rendering.

Syntactic ambiguity arises not from the range of meanings of single words, but from the relationship between the words and clauses of a sentence, and the sentence structure underlying the word order therein (Berk 1999:179-85). In other words, a sentence is syntactically ambiguous when a reader or listener can reasonably interpret one sentence as having more than one possible structure. One widely cited example of structural ambiguity is ‘Flying planes can be dangerous’ (either the act of flying planes is dangerous, or planes that are flying are dangerous). This type of ambiguity is discussed through examples with reference to translating between Arabic and English in more detailed below.\(^\text{11}\)

Apparently, expressions with adjectives account for a great (if not the greatest) part of collocations in Arabic and English. While these are not as strictly formed as idioms or proverbs, collocations tend to reflect how the speakers of a language accumulate their linguistic repertoire and tend to view the material phenomena, abstract concepts and even emotional attachments. In translation, violations of TL collocational patterns may not result in grave semantic errors but

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\(^{10}\) For more details on ambiguity, further and interesting details are also available in *Seven Types of Ambiguity* by William Empson, *The Blackwell Companion to Syntax* by Martin Everaert and Henk van Riemsdijk, and *Aspects of the Syntax of Agreement* by Cedric Boeckx.

\(^{11}\) There are some techniques that a translator can resort to while dealing with ambiguity. Componential analysis is a useful tool that can assist the translator, but its use may consume his/her much needed time, and in some case can prove useless.
they often lead to any of the following results: TT recipient may have a lame attitude to the violation and may consider the translation as weak; TT recipient may be led to think that the violation is meant to evoke specific connotations and stylistic effects; TT recipient may be led to think that such construction is a literal rendition of the ST expression (hence awareness of the nature of TT as a translated work is intensified). Consider the following examples: “Lying on a soft mattress, he kept singing in a soft voice all the night”. The first ‘soft’ can be translated into Arabic as ناعم (the literal meaning), but it would be culturally unacceptable to use the word ناعم (naa’m) to describe a man’s voice (given the feminine connotations of the Arabic adjective if used to describe someone’s voice vs. Arab male-chauvinist culture – unless the translator needs to emphasize the effeminate nature of the singer); instead, the word رخيم (raxiim) can be used as an equivalent of the second ‘soft’ in the sentence.

 Ideally, no matter what type of ambiguity may be encountered, a translator is supposed to provide TT recipient with the content of ST. The word ‘content’ here refers initially to TT conceptual body, but stylistic elements may as well be part of that body in some texts – particularly legal and literary texts. Just as relativity is unavoidable in interpretation of utterances/texts (Steiner 1975; Sapir 1921), the case also applies as far as translation is concerned. Therefore, a translator is ideally expected to provide TT recipients with ‘correctness of information’ and ‘lucidity of expression’, given the stylistic and cultural aspects of TL.

 The language of news and advertising generally abounds in deliberate use of ambiguity with the purpose of stirring reader’s admiration of the expression or attracting reader’s attention to know more about the content. Translators generally find it difficult to reflect the same nuances between languages. Take, for example, the advertisement of KFC chicken as ‘fingerlicking’. In some cultures (such as in the West and America), the licking of fingers after having food may not be seen as a good habit and sometimes even seen as abhorrent behaviour, so it can be said that the ad has achieved it purpose by using exaggeration and norm breaking, as if to say that KFC chicken is so tasty you will break the norm and lick your fingers after you finish up the last piece of your order. In order to translate that into Arabic, the first problem is that there is no adjective in Arabic equivalent to the English adjective ‘fingerlicking’: multiple words must be used to convey the sense. Secondly, the act of licking fingers after having food is a (religiously recommended) habit for Arabs. In other words, it may be perceived that KFC chicken is tasty

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12 Venuti’s (1995) concepts of domestication and foreignization apply here.
and that you will lick your finger after having it, but there is no implication that the taste will be so good that it will entice you to break a norm. Clearly, given that KFC is a multinational, the effect this ad has on ST recipients (English) loses its poignancy in translation into Arabic.

In order to set apart a class of adjectives, the criteria invoked by Baker and Dixon include the following (cited in Hofherr and Matushansky 2010:2):


b. Adjectives differ from other predicates in the comparative construction (Dixon 2004:11,21).

c. Adjectives do not have their own gender, they agree in gender with the modified noun (Baker 2003:247, Dixon 2004:23).


The criteria above relate to and are applicable in most languages, although not all. They are by no means exhaustive. Nevertheless, they highlight intrinsic aspects of adjectives in general. In criterion 3, for instance, it is logical to infer that adjectives generally acquire the gender and number of the nouns they describe, even if such agreement is not represented morphologically or syntactically: in ‘I saw an old man’, for example, one cannot imagine the word ‘old’ as feminine or as referring to more than one man. In English, however, although this implicit gender affiliation of adjectives seems to be restricted to nouns in which gender is a matter of fact (such as ‘man’, ‘woman’, ‘boy’, ‘cow’, etc.), it also casts its shadow on some other nouns that are conventionally regarded as neutral. To clarify this point, when one develops personal attachment to one’s car or ship, for example, one tends to use the pronoun ‘her’ to refer to them (e.g. ‘This is my first car and I take great care of her.’). In Arabic, however, gender-number-case agreement between adjectives and nouns is represented morphologically and syntactically: consider the following example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>السهر</th>
<th>أضناهما</th>
<th>المتعبتان</th>
<th>العينان</th>
<th>تلّكما</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DEF+insomnia+SING +MAS+NOM</td>
<td>affect+PAST+SING G+MAS+ OBJ. PRON+DUAL</td>
<td>DEF+tired+DUAL+FEM+NOM</td>
<td>DEF+eye+DUAL+FEM+NOM</td>
<td>this+DUAL+FEM</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Those tired eyes have been affected by sleeplessness.

The example above shows that in order to agree with the noun it refers to, the adjective المتعبتان inflected for number (dual), gender (feminine), case (nominative) and definiteness.

On the one hand, the position of adjective in Arabic after the noun it refers to dissipates most of the concerns of any adjective-related structural ambiguity while on the other hand any remaining concerns are expected to evaporate within this case-gender-number-(in)definiteness agreement (and subsequent inflection) – except for the case of quantity terms (numbers), which are described in Arabic grammar not as adjectives but as *tamyiz* (identification) terms, and have their own complex system. The examples below illustrate this argument.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>المجتهدين</th>
<th>الطلابات</th>
<th>و</th>
<th>المجتهدين</th>
<th>الطلاب</th>
<th>جميع</th>
<th>الامتحان</th>
<th>في</th>
<th>نجح</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>al-mudžtahid-aat-i</td>
<td>at-taalib-aat-i</td>
<td>wa</td>
<td>al- al-mudžtahid-in-a</td>
<td>at-țollaabi</td>
<td>dğami i3u</td>
<td>al-imtihaan-i</td>
<td>fi</td>
<td>nadýah a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Def+ hard working+ FEM+PL+NOM and Def+ hard working+ MAS+PL+NOM DEF+student+F EM+PL+NOM DEF+student+ MAS+P L+NO M DEF+ exam+ MAS+SING+ GEN in succee d+ PAST+ SING+ MAS

All hard working (male and female) students passed the test.

Notice in the example above that the gender distinction between students can better be removed from the English translation of the sentence – unless special emphasis on gender distinction is required.

Since numerals are part of the adjectival system of English, it is relevant to shed light on its complexities in Arabic although Arabic grammar categorizes quantifiers under a separate

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13 The verb comes in the masculine form because in mixed gender subjects the masculine form is used. Generally, unless specific emphasis is required, when masculine and feminine actors/patients both exist in a sentence, the masculine precedes the feminine. Moreover, this is a VOS structure in which despite plural subjects, the verb is in the singular form. Had the sentences started with a plural noun, the verb would have inflected to show agreement not only in terms of number but also gender.
term, *tamyiz* (identification). Ordinal numbers in Arabic are treated like other adjectives, showing agreement with nouns in number, gender, case and definiteness. As in English, all *tamyiz* terms (cardinal numbers) in Arabic – except 1 and 2 – occur before the nouns they refer to: e.g.

خمسة و عشرون رجل

radżul-an ifruun wa xams-at-un

Men twenty and five+FEM+NOM

Twenty five men.

In numerals 3 to 10, the numeral is inflected with the feminine form if it refers to a masculine noun, and becomes masculine if the noun referred to is feminine. The rule also applies to the numerals 13-19, 23-29, 33-39, and so on – i.e. feminine numeral for masculine noun, and vice versa. The numerals 1 and 2, 11 and 12, 21 and 22, 31 and 32 and so on agree with the gender of the nouns they refer to. The rounded numerals 20, 30, 40 up to 100 (and so are 1000, 10000 etc.) remain neutral and are not inflected for both genders.

As for number agreement, while English has only two categories (singular and plural), Arabic has an additional category (i.e. dual). If stated explicitly, the word (واحدة* waaḥid(atun) – i.e. one+MAS(FEM) – usually follows the noun it refers to, just like adjectives, and agrees in number and gender, although most of the time it is implied as part of indefinite nouns and may not be used at all:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(واحدة)</th>
<th>امرأة</th>
<th>و</th>
<th>(واحد)</th>
<th>رجل</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(waaḥid-at-un)</td>
<td>imra?at-un</td>
<td>wa</td>
<td>(waaḥid-un)</td>
<td>radżul-un</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INDEF+one+SING+G+FEM+NOM</td>
<td>INDEF+woman+SING+NOM</td>
<td>and</td>
<td>INDEF+one+SING+MAS+NOM</td>
<td>INDEF+man+SING+NOM</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A man and a woman.

The same also applies for the dual category, except that the noun referred to is inflected for case, number (dual) and gender – e.g.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(الثنين)</th>
<th>امرأتين</th>
<th>و</th>
<th>(الثنين)</th>
<th>رجلين</th>
<th>رأيت</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(iөn-at-ain-i)</td>
<td>imra?at-ain-i</td>
<td>wa</td>
<td>(iөnain-i)</td>
<td>radżul-ain-i</td>
<td>ra?a-it-u</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The numbers 3-10 are usually followed by nouns in the plural form while numbers 11-$\infty$ are followed by nouns in the singular form, although the reference is plural. With this complex system, the translator from Arabic into English may hardly face any ambiguity; however, certain instances are likely to happen if the nouns after the number are of the same gender – e.g.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>fatajaat-in</th>
<th>wa</th>
<th>nisaa?-en</th>
<th>ظافر</th>
<th>حضرت</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>girls+GEN</td>
<td>and</td>
<td>women+ GEN</td>
<td>ten+MAS+NOM</td>
<td>attend+PAST+FEM+PL.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ten women and girls attended.

The example has two interpretation: either the total number of women and girls was ten, or ten women plus unspecified number of girls attended. ST context can be the only source for clues to disambiguate the meaning.

It has been indicated above that while adjectives in English do not inflect for gender, number or case, adjectives in Arabic do. While translating from Arabic into English, ambiguity in terms of adjectives is unlikely to occur, except when the nouns following the adjective are of the same gender – e.g.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>جميلات</th>
<th>فتيات</th>
<th>و</th>
<th>نساء</th>
<th>رأيت</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ذمامیلا-ات-ین</td>
<td>fatajaat-in</td>
<td>wa</td>
<td>nisaa?-an</td>
<td>را؟یت-ی-و</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INDEF+beautiful+FEM+PL+ACC</td>
<td>INDEF+girl+PL+ACC</td>
<td>and</td>
<td>INDEF+woman+PL+ACC</td>
<td>see+PAST+I+NOM</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I saw beautiful women and girls.
It is more likely that both women and girls were beautiful, although it is also possible that the adjective ‘beautiful’ refers to the girls only. In both cases, however, the ambiguity can be rendered into English as it is in Arabic. Compare the above example with the one below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>جميلات</th>
<th>نساء</th>
<th>و</th>
<th>رجال</th>
<th>رآيت</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>djamii-l-at-in</td>
<td>nisaa?an</td>
<td>wa</td>
<td>ridjaal-an</td>
<td>ra?ait-u</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INDEF+beautiful+FEM+PL+ACC</td>
<td>INDEF+women+ACC</td>
<td>and</td>
<td>INDEF+men+ACC</td>
<td>see+PAST+I+NOM</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I saw men and beautiful women.

Obviously, the adjective جميلات ‘beautiful’ inflected for case, number and gender, and refers to ‘women’ only. Therefore, the fact that adjectives in Arabic inflect to agree with nouns in terms of case, number and gender puts the Arabic-English translator at ease with regard to adjective-based ambiguity. Compare the following example of a sentence translated from English to Arabic:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>These</th>
<th>are</th>
<th>peaceful</th>
<th>men</th>
<th>and</th>
<th>women.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The adjective refers to men only.</td>
<td>هولاء رجالا مسلمون ونساء.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both men and women are peaceful.</td>
<td>هولاء رجالا ونساء مسلمين.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although the second sense is more likely, the first one is also possible. In the second, the adjective is repeated, and the necessary inflections added.

A salient feature of adjectives in both Arabic and English is that they both accommodate comparison of adjectives. One may say that a translator can find huge similarity between Arabic and English. For gradable adjectives, English has three forms (positive, comparative and superlative), and so does Arabic. English adjectives use ‘-er … than’ and ‘the -est’ (or ‘more … than’ and ‘the most …?’), and Arabic adjectives use almost similar structures, albeit with a little further inflection in the form. Consider the following example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Superlative</th>
<th>Comparative</th>
<th>Positive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>الأطول</td>
<td>أطول من</td>
<td>طويل</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?al-?atwal</td>
<td>?atwal min</td>
<td>?awiil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English ST</td>
<td>Arabic TT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He became mad about her.</td>
<td>أصبح متيما بها</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Later, things got dirty.</td>
<td>سابت الأمور فيما بعد</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My dreams will come true.</td>
<td>ستحقق أحلامي</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The milk went bad.</td>
<td>فسد الحليب</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To grow thin.</td>
<td>ينحف</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To turn green.</td>
<td>(Become ill/pale) (Pay attention to environment)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the first example, although the v.+adj. construction of ST is rendered with a similar construction (with a semantic change in the form of the adjective), it is also possible to replace the v.+adj. construction of ST with a verb only in TT. In the next four examples, grammatical shifts took place: the v.+adj. construction of ST is rendered in the verb form. The adjective in the last ST example has two metaphorical extensions, and the TT has been rendered

* Notice that the adjective form turns into noun form in the comparative and superlative constructions.
in correspondence with both meanings, but the literal Arabic meaning of the word ‘green’ is not used, nonetheless.

The relationship between intensifiers and adjectives reflects a big grammatical difference between Arabic and English. Intensification in English can be expressed using a bulk of words and constructions. In Arabic, by contrast, there is a very limited number of intensifiers. The word جدا ‘very’ is the most common word, and usually comes after the adjective it intensifies.\(^{14}\)

In Arabic, one would be enticed to assume that the gender and number of the adjective should necessarily be the same as the gender and number of the noun it refers to. Interestingly, certain nouns which have masculine gender in the singular and dual forms take a pseudo-feminine form in the plural. Besides, the tendency is that the feminine adjectives following pseudo-feminine plural nouns are kept in the singular form, although plural feminine adjectives may be used. Generally, most of the non-human singular masculine Arabic nouns take pseudo-feminine form in the plural, but their adjectives remain singular feminine. Notice the following examples:\(^{15}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Dual</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>مثلث كبير</td>
<td>مثلثان كبيران</td>
<td>مثلثات كبيرة</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transliteration</td>
<td>mu&lt;sup&gt;o&lt;/sup&gt;alla&lt;sup&gt;o&lt;/sup&gt; kabir</td>
<td>mu&lt;sup&gt;o&lt;/sup&gt;alla&lt;sup&gt;o&lt;/sup&gt;-aan kabir-aan</td>
<td>mu&lt;sup&gt;o&lt;/sup&gt;alla&lt;sup&gt;o&lt;/sup&gt;-aat kabir-ah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word-for-word Trans.</td>
<td>rectangle(MAS+SING) big(MAS+SING)</td>
<td>rectangle(MAS+DUAL) big(MAS+ DUAL)</td>
<td>rectangle(FEM+PL) big(FEM+SING)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eng. TT</td>
<td>Big rectangle</td>
<td>Two big rectangles</td>
<td>Big rectangles</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Arabic  | مربع صغير           | مربعان صغيران      | مربعات صغيرة       |
| Transliteration | murabba<sup>t</sup> ʂaghiir | murabba<sup>t</sup>-aan ʂaghiir-aan | murabba<sup>t</sup>-aat ʂaghiir-ah |
| Word-for-word Trans. | square(MAS+SING) small(MAS+SING) | square(MAS+ DUAL) small(MAS+ DUAL) | square(FEM+PL) small(FEM+SING) |
| Eng. TT | small square         | two small squares  | small squares       |

Arabic

| تطبيق مفيد | تطبيقات مفيدة |
| Transliteration | taṭbiq mufiid | taṭbiq-aan mufiidaan | taṭbiq-aat mufiid-ah |
| Word-for-word Trans. | application(MAS+SING) | application(MAS+ ) | application(FEM+PL) |

\(^{14}\) In certain spoken Arabic dialects, this word may precede the adjective.

\(^{15}\) Arabic examples should be read from right to left, as adjectives occur after nouns. Adjectives are underlined. Notice that while demonstratives of non-human plural masculine nouns also take the pseudo-feminine form they remain in the singular form, just like adjectives.
The above points of comparison between both adjectival systems remain general. Like humans, languages dress up, attired in words arranged in specific grammatical orders, but the way a language dresses up and puts on its individual touches reveals aspects of its uniqueness. The above discussion showed only the general attires of English and Arabic adjectival systems when they are subjected to the scissors of a tailor, a translator. However, there remains a bulk of issues consisting in irregularities (i.e. irregular adjectives, irregular verbs, irregular plurals, etc.). The way these aspects are reflected and handled in translation depends mainly on the translator’s linguistic knowledge and expertise.

It has been noted that while in English adjectives remain unaffected (at least morphologically and syntactically in most cases) by the gender, number and case of the nouns they refer to, the adjectival system of Arabic is controlled by the case-number-gender agreement of adjectives and nouns. Arabic is endowed with a complex system of inflection and concatenation – let alone the use of diacritics¹⁷ – that helps reduce ambiguity. It has also been proved that such aspect of the adjectival system of Arabic spares the translator much trouble (caused by potential ambiguity of reference) while translating from Arabic to English. Nonetheless, this ease may not be available while translating from English to Arabic because the

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¹⁶ Normally plural nouns in Arabic are formed by adding ‘-un/in’ (masculine) or ‘-aat’ (feminine) to the singular form. However, there is also a category of irregular plural (known in Arabic as broken plural), e.g. the word ‘mashru3 (project) can take both regular plural ‘mashru3aat’ and irregular plural ‘mashaari3’ – the latter is preferred.

¹⁷ Although the current use of the diacritic system is somewhat confined to literary and religious texts (to maintain correctness of meaning and prosody), sporadic uses of this system may appear in other texts to avoid semantic ambiguity, given the nature of Arabic vowel system and verb root. The value of the diacritic system can be seen while machine-translating (MT) texts from Arabic to English. For example, unless differentiated by context and neighboring words, the word ‘كلية’ may appear in MT as ‘college’ and ‘kidney’.

17
adjectival system of Arabic requires more details (mainly gender and number) which the English ST (and its grammatical nature) may not offer. Potential ambiguity in translating adjectives from English into Arabic is more likely to happen if the adjectives refer to compound nouns (e.g. prolonged project implementation process) or multiple nouns with gender variation (e.g. prolonged implementation and process). While translating English compound nouns into Arabic, various types of translation shifts (Catford 1965/1978) take place quite often in order to maintain grammatical correctness and stylistic flavour of TL.

To further elucidate the argument so far, a translation of a formal document (job description for a government body) has been used as a case study, providing a few examples that can highlight some of the difficulties of translating adjectives from English into Arabic. Originally written in English by an HR expert, the document was particularly chosen because, firstly, authentic examples can reveal real problems of translation and, secondly, such texts (i.e. job descriptions) tend to abound in adjectives and compound nouns. The discussion of the examples reveals some salient adjective-related modifications in this translation and in translating adjectives in general.

1. Potential ambiguity caused by order of adjectives

ST 1) The management of various social welfare and development funds

TT 1) إدارة صناديق الرعاية والتنمية الاجتماعية المختلفة

The potential ambiguity of the references of the two premodifying adjectives ‘various’ and ‘social’ could have been due to the fact that adjectives postmodify nouns in Arabic. The process of disambiguation was based on context and logical inference, using componential analysis technique.

ST 2) Innovative social and labor services and techniques

TT 2) الخدمات والتقنيات المبتكرة للщенون الاجتماعية والتغيل

There are 3 adjectives (considering ‘labor’ (n) to be performing an adjectival function) and two headwords. The premodifying position of the adjectives implies that all three refer to both nouns equally. Since both nouns in Arabic are feminine in both singular and plural forms, the first adjective (‘innovative’) can be translated without any problem (i.e. in the feminine form). But,

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18 Notice also that in compound nouns, there is a headword while the remaining word(s) can be seen more or less as attributes (details and descriptions) of that headword – e.g. in ‘project implementation’ the headword is ‘project’ whereas ‘implementation’ is a subordinate word in the NP.

19 However, as the translator is not at liberty to disclose further details about the nature of this document – considering first the translator’s ethical commitment to maintain client confidentiality.
given the weight of the other two adjectives in the context, it was stylistically relevant to make a class shift and translate them in the nominal forms (TT backtranslated as: the innovative services and techniques of social and labour affairs).

ST 3) Prepare special audit and control reports.

TT 3) بعد التقارير الخاصة المتصلة بالتداخل الموالي الرقابة

The adjective ‘special’ (خاصة) poses a potential problem. If the sentence were translated as بعد تقارير التداخل الموالي والرقابة الخاصة (i.e. literal translation), TT reader may think that the adjective refers to the word ‘control’ rather than ‘reports’. To solve this problem, the term المتصلة ب (concerning/related to) has been added – (backtranslated: Prepare special reports of audit and control).

ST 4) Strong judgment, problem-solving and crisis management skills

TT 4) تقدير الأمور وحل المسألة وإدارة الأزمات في مهارات قوية

The difficulty in this sentence revolves around the adjective ‘strong’: does it refer to 1) ‘judgment’ alone or 2) ‘skills’ alone or 3) ‘judgment’ and ‘problem-solving’ and ‘crisis management’? The translator has chosen the second option, considering that ‘strong skills’ can apply to ‘judgment’, ‘problem-solving’ and ‘crisis management’ (backtranslated: Strong skills of judgment, problem-solving and crisis management).

ST 5) Strong influence and negotiation skills

TT 5) تأثير قوي ومهارات قوية في التفاوض

Potential ambiguity results from the compound nouns: does the adjective ‘strong’ refer to 1) ‘influence’ or 2) ‘skills’ or 3) ‘influence’ and ‘negotiation’? The translator has chosen to apply it to both 1 and 2, drawing also on the stylistic aspects of Arabic. Moreover, since the term for ‘influence’ in Arabic is masculine and the term for ‘skills’ is feminine, the Arabic translation for ‘strong’ has been repeated twice to mark gender agreement.

ST 6) Excellent organizational management skills

TT 6) مهارات ممتازة في الإدارة التنظيمية

The translator has chosen to separate ‘excellent skills’ from ‘organizational management’, because otherwise the literal translation of the expression would have produced مهارات إدارة تنظيمية ممتازة i.e. the adjective ‘excellent’ may be understood to refer to ‘management’ instead.

ST 7) international legal changes and developments in the field of labor and social development
A potential ambiguity centres on the word ‘labor’: is it an independent entity or a part of ‘labor development’? The translator has chosen the former one based on the significance of the term in the context.

2. Translation shift:

ST 1) Social and labor planning tools, and service standards
TT أدوات التخطيط للْئون الإجتماعية والتْغيل، ومعايير الخدمة

Catford (1965: 73), who first introduced this term, defines translation shifts as “departures from formal correspondence in the process of going from the SL to the TL”. Based on the context, a translation shift was required in the example above, adding a noun (i.e. ‘affairs’) to the adjective ‘social’. Backtranslation reads as follows: ‘Planning tools for social affairs and labour, and service standards’.

ST 2) effective induction programs
TT برامج تمهيدية فعالة

The noun ‘induction’ has been rendered into TT in the adjectival form for stylistic reasons.

ST 3) Strong analytical and organizational skills
TT مهارات تحليلية وتنظيمية قوية

Comparing backtranslation to ST (‘strong skills in analysis and organization), it is observed that two adjectives have undergone changes, a translation shift: both ‘analytical’ and ‘organizational’ have been made nouns because otherwise there would be a big gap between the noun and the main adjective, ‘strong, and the adjective ‘strong’ may be understood by TT reader to refer to ‘organization’.

ST 4) Strong project management skills
TT مهارات قوية في إدارة المشاريع

Just as in the previous example, the same technique has been followed. Compare backtranslation to ST: ‘strong skills in project management’.

3. Adjectives referring to nouns of different genders

As most English adjectives are not gender-specific or gender-based, this neutrality poses problems while translating from English to Arabic, particularly when a neutral adjective refers to two or more nouns with different genders in Arabic. In such cases, if the English nouns cannot be translated into Arabic using nouns of the same gender (say, by exploiting the semantic aspects
of Arabic, e.g. synonymy, hypernymy, etc.), the translator may have to turn to repetition or translation shifts. Consider the following examples:

ST 1) short-term expert and mission

الخبر العالم قصير المدى والبعثة قصيرة المدى (1)

There is potential ambiguity as to whether the adjective ‘short-term’ refers to both nouns ‘expert’ and ‘mission’ or to the first one only, but based on the translator’s knowledge of the context, the first option is assumed to be true. Again, if the ‘expert’ were female, and not a male (as was the case, in fact), the translator would not have any gender-based problem since the noun ‘mission’ (with its various meanings) has feminine equivalent(s) in Arabic. But, since the ‘expert’ was a male, the adjective ‘short-term’ has been rendered into Arabic twice – first in the masculine form to match with ‘expert’ and second in the feminine form to match ‘mission’.

ST 2) a reporting methodology for both internal and external transmission and processes

منهجية إبلاغ للتداول أو المعاملات سواء على المستوى الداخلي أو الخارجي (2)

The last two nouns ‘transmission’ and ‘processes’ have Arabic equivalents with different genders – تداول (tadawul) and معاملات (muhamalaat), respectively. A translation shift has been made to accommodate gender difference, i.e. (backtranslated: a reporting methodology for transmission and processes at both internal and external levels).

4. Adjectives vis-à-vis stylistics

Every language has preferences to express or describe things. Stylistic techniques, collocations, idioms etc. are manifestations of this tendency. As far as the translation of adjectives is concerned, the literal translation of certain English adjectival collocations into Arabic may end up using clumsy expressions – though not necessarily wrong. The following examples illustrate the case.

ST 1) Strategic and operational planning, reengineering and performance management at central and local levels

التحديث الإستراتيجي والتشغيلي في عمليات التخطيط وإعادة الهيكلة وإدارة الأداء على المستويين المركزي والمحلي (1)

The backtranslation is as follows: ‘the strategic and operational modernization in the processes of planning, reengineering and performance management at central and local levels’. The nouns ‘modernization’ and ‘processes’ have been added for specific reasons: the former was based on the context, the latter was based on the colloquial system of Arabic. At the grammatical level
of ST, one finds the first two adjectives followed by multiple nouns. In other words, for the translator into Arabic, do these two adjectives refer to a specific noun or to all nouns in the sentence – so as to maintain gender and number of the adjectives? Moreover, at the semantic level of ST, one may get the feel that the nouns are subordinate to the adjectives. That is to say that the focus is rather on ‘strategic and operational’ than on the following nouns.

**ST 2) immediate and long-term staff requirements**

Arabic does not form new words by hyphenation or combining words, as does English in compound adjectives (e.g. well-dressed, ever-changing, straightforward, easy-going). The ST here has two adjectives and a compound noun. Arabic does not have a single term equivalent to the adjective ‘long-term’: in fact, this English adjective has a mould/cliché as its equivalent in Arabic (على المدى البعيد؛ طويل الأجل). For stylistic reasons, the adjective ‘immediate’ should be translated using a similar cliché to maintain balance in terms of importance between both adjectives. Backtranslation reads as follows: “the requirements needed in the cadre whether those needed on face of speed [cliché for ‘immediate’] or in the long term”.

**ST 3) Establish a set of robust human resources policies, procedures, practices, standards and tools that are consistent with international best practices**

Basically, the entire ST text focuses on the development of human resources. The translation into Arabic evokes this point and has used it to solve potential ambiguity arising from the separation between the adjective ‘robust’ and the nouns it refers to. Compare backtranslation: “Reinforce HR by establishing a robust set of policies, procedures, practices, standards and tools that are consistent with international best practices”. The change of position of the adjective can be justified because the word ‘set’ in the backtranslation (i.e. مجموعة in TT) as a collective noun of quantity becomes meaningful only by virtue of the noun(s) it quantifies.

5. **Adjectives and lack of word-to-word equivalent**

Not all adjectives in one language can have word-to-word equivalents in other languages; meanings can be conveyed, though, using multiple terms. Consider the following examples:

**ST 1) Superior verbal and written communication and interpersonal skills**

مهارات فائقة في التخاطب شفويا وكتابيا وفي التعامل مع الآخرين (1)
In this example the headword is ‘skills’ and the first-rank adjective is ‘superior’. Both the expressions ‘verbal and written communication’ and ‘interpersonal’ add information to the headword. But while the first expression is a noun with two adjectives (NP₁), the second is only one adjective. Further, the term ‘interpersonal’ has no word-to-word equivalent in Arabic. Given all that, the translator has chosen to express the meaning of this adjective in an NP on par with NP₁. Backtranslation reads as “superior skills in communicating orally and in writing [Arabic uses one word here, كتّابي] and in dealing with others”.

ST 2) Ensures proper and timely performance appraisal of staffs

TT 2) يضمن تنفيذ التقييم لأداء الموظفين بالطريقة السليمة وفي الوقت المناسب

Just as ‘interpersonal’ has no word-to-word equivalent in Arabic, so is the word ‘timely’. It can be translated into Arabic as ‘in the right time’, but the use of several words to translate this adjective into Arabic created stylistic reasons to modify the translation of the other one, to strike balance between both adjectives. Backtranslation reads as “Ensures implementation of appraisal of staff performance in the proper manner and in the right time.”

6. Combinations of adjectives and nouns to describe nouns

The following examples show combinations of adjectives and nouns describing headword(s). The Arabic TT tackled such issues using various techniques.

ST 1) have experience in general, business, contract, Labor and employment laws

TT 1) لديه خبرة عامة في القانون، مع خبرة متخصصة في القانون التجاري وقوانين العمل وقوانين التشغيل وعقود العمل

The adjective ‘general’ refers to ‘laws’, and so do the subsequent nouns. In dealing with this point, the translator resorted to repetition of the headword ‘laws’. Backtranslation reads as “have general experience in law, along with specialist experience in business laws, employment laws, labor laws and contracts”. Ultimately, the idea of ST sentence seems to be weakly expressed – which is another issue sometimes translators face in their practice.

ST 2) Have extensive understanding of local and state legal principles, concepts, theory, laws, regulations, and practices

TT 2) يمتلك اطلاع قانوني واسع بالمبادئ والنظريات والقوانين والقواعد واللوائح والممارسات على المستوى المحلي والوطني

This example poses two challenges to the translator. First, both ‘local’ and ‘state’ function as adjectives – running on to the adjective ‘legal’ – despite the fact that the second one is a noun.
Second, the adjectives are followed by a number of nouns – given the problems related to number and gender. To solve this problem, the translator rendered ‘local’ and ‘state’ in an independent adverbial chunk, and attached the adjective ‘legal’ to the noun ‘understanding’. Backtranslation reads as “have extensive legal understanding of principles, concepts, theory, laws, regulations, and practices at the local and national levels”. If the translator avoided the translation of ‘local’ and ‘state’ in an adverbial unit, the TT recipient may be misguided to think that both adjectives refer to the noun ‘practices’ only.

The list and examples of adjective-related translation problems is by no means exhaustive, and are more or less some of the common challenges emanating from the variations of the adjectival systems of both Arabic and English. Language studies in general attempt to pin down rules and regulations to reflect systematic mechanisms of communication, but languages are dynamic and constantly evolving and each language has its own peculiarities and ‘personal’ aspects that defy its own grammar, let alone amenable translatability into other languages. After all, translation profession involves good many factors working simultaneously and it is the translator’s experience and knowledge of both languages and cultures that determine how decisions are made and challenges overcome. Ultimately, however, everything in one language can be translated into another language (Jakobson 1959: 115). For example, although the adjective ‘interesting’ is a widely used word in English, it has at least three meanings in Arabic based on the context. Present participial adjectives in English can cause ambiguity due to the fact that the present participle form can be used to form nouns as well – e.g. “They are hunting dogs”. Sometimes, English adjectives followed by infinitive (particularly ergative verbs) can also create ambiguity – e.g. “The chicken is ready to eat”. Some English adjectives and nouns have the same forms, such as ‘the poor’ and ‘the rich’. Generally, however, such grey areas are peculiar aspects of languages, and during translating the translator should remain alert and resourceful to deal with them separately.

In conclusion, Modern Standard Arabic is a highly inflectional language with a rich, yet complex, system of concatenation. In addition, while word order is of great importance, Arabic morphology and syntax promotes a complex system of agreement rules, based on 4 aspects (gender, number, case and (in)definiteness) – apart from the use of diacritics if need be. Despite the difficulty they may pose to novice and non-Arab translators, such features are of great value.

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20 ‘Interesting’ can be translated into Arabic as مثير للإهتمام (attracting attention), نافع (useful) and ممتع (exciting).
in dissipating potential ambiguity a translator may face. By contrast, the fact that such features are not morphologically represented in English sentences increases the possibility of potential ambiguity a translator may find while translating into Arabic. This issue has been proved above with a special focus on the translation of adjectives in Arabic and English. Useful to translators and linguists involved in both Arabic and English, the study has pinpointed remarkable differences (and also similarities) between both adjectival systems, and provided real-life examples to show not only likely hurdles and pitfalls, but also insisted that a translator’s decision-making process should be open to flexible options, provided that accuracy of content and lucidity of expression are maintained. However, while it is recommended that a translator should always think outside the box and remember that TT audience are not the same as ST audience, there are always rules to follow alongside sundry other factors (i.e. text type, translation function and *skopos*, etc.).
Works Cited:


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