

ISSUES IN TRANSLATING ENGLISH AND ARABIC PLURALS

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Abstract:

This study explores undergraduate students' difficulties in translating English and Arabic plurals. The results of an English and Arabic plural translation test exhibited cases where Arabic plurals matching those in English were translated correctly. However, the students had difficulty translating the following: (i) Arabic plurals with a singular English equivalent, e.g., مجوهرات /mujaawharaat/ jewellery; (ii) Arabic duals with two different singular stems, e.g., الرافدان /alrafadan/ the Tigris and Euphrates; (iii) multiple Arabic plurals, i.e. plurals of paucity and multiplicity, e.g., دجاج /dajaaaj/ chicken, دجاجات /dajaaajaat/ a number of hens; (iv) stems with two plurals and different usages, e.g., economics اقتصاديات /iqtisadiyyaat/, economies اقتصادات /iqtisadaat/; (v) compound plurals, e.g., image processors معالجات الصور /muSaaliijaat aṣṣuwar/; (vi) English nouns ending in -ies that have the same singular and plural form, e.g., series, species; (vii) singular and plural forms of the same base when the base could assume two parts of speech, e.g., rich and riches; wood and woods; (viii) foreign/Latin singular and plural forms, e.g., indices, larvae, tempi, oases; and (ix) names of tools and articles of dress consisting of two parts ending in -s, e.g., scissors مقص /miqaṣ/, مقصات /miqaṣaat/, scales ميزان /mīzaan/ موازين and /mawazīn/ and more. Error data analysis showed that the subjects made more errors in translating Arabic plurals into English than in translating English plurals into Arabic, made more interlanguage than intralanguage errors, had more morphological than semantic difficulties on the Arabic-English plural translation test, and had more semantic difficulties on the English-Arabic plural translation test. They tended to translate imitatively rather than discriminately, and literal translation was the most common strategy. When they could not access the meaning of a noun on the test, they provided an equivalent that was phonologically close, or offered a paraphrase, an explanation, or an extraneous equivalent. In translating English and Arabic plurals, transfers were bidirectional, i.e., students transferred a noun's morphological features from the source to the target language, regardless of whether the source language was Arabic (L1) or English (L2). Recommendations for plural translation instruction are provided.

Keywords: Plural acquisition; Plural morphology; English plurals; Arabic plurals; Translation of plurals; Translation errors; Translation problems.