

Mustansiriyah University

College of Arts

Department of English Language and Literature

Lecture 1

Introduction to Translation

4th stage

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Translation is the process of conveying the meaning and intention of a text from a source language into a target language, producing an equivalent text in the new language that preserves content, style, and function as much as possible.

Translation is more than replacing words from one language to another; it is a bridge between cultures, ideas, and styles.

This introductory lecture will discuss:

1. Types of Translation
2. Common Problems in Translation
3. Qualities of a Successful Translator
4. Basic Principles of Translation
5. Key Language Points to Consider When Translating Between English and Arabic.

1. Types of Translation

- Literary Translation – novels, poetry, plays. Focus on style, imagery, and emotions. Example: Translating Shakespeare’s metaphors into Arabic without losing beauty or rhythm.
- Scientific/Technical Translation – manuals, medical texts, research articles. Accuracy and terminology are essential. Example: Rendering “heart failure” as فشل القلب not قصور القلب.

- Legal Translation – contracts, laws, court documents. Requires precision, no ambiguity. Example: Translating “party of the first part” carefully as الطرف الأول to avoid misinterpretation.
- Administrative/Official Translation – certificates, reports, official letters. Must be formal and clear.
- Media/Journalistic Translation – news articles, reports, blogs. Requires speed and adaptation for audience. Example: An English idiom like “political deadlock” can be rendered as الجمود السياسي.
- Interpretation (Oral Translation): simultaneous or consecutive. Requires strong memory, quick thinking, and listening skills.

2. Common Problems in Translation

❖ Grammatical Differences

English: Subject–Verb–Object (SVO).

Arabic: Verb–Subject–Object (VSO) often.

Example:

EN: The students read the book.

AR: قرأ الطلاب الكتاب.

❖ Idioms and Cultural Expressions can't be translated literally.

Example: It's raining cats and dogs → تمطر بغزارة.

❖ Polysemy (multiple meanings of one word)

Bank (financial institution / river bank). The translator must choose the correct sense.

❖ Register and Style

Formal vs. informal.

Example: Translating an academic article should not use colloquial Arabic.

❖ Terminology Gaps

Some terms have no direct equivalent. Requires adaptation or explanation.

Example: Brain Drain

Literal translation: “نزيف الأدمغة” (Bleeding of brains) – unnatural in Arabic.

Better translation: “هجرة العقول” or “هجرة الكفاءات” – commonly used and conveys the intended social meaning.

→ This shows how a translator handles a terminology gap by choosing a culturally appropriate equivalent instead of a literal one.

3. Qualities of a Successful Translator

- Strong command of both languages (grammar, vocabulary, style).
- Cultural awareness and sensitivity.
- Research skills (using dictionaries, glossaries, reliable online sources).
- Writing skills: producing fluent, natural text in the target language.
- Attention to detail and accuracy.
- Professional ethics: honesty, confidentiality, and meeting deadlines.

4. Basic Principles of Translation

- Understand the source text fully before translating.

Never translate sentence by sentence without full comprehension.

- Translate meaning, not words.

Example:

- Wrong: He kicked the bucket → ركل الدلو
- Right: He kicked the bucket → توفي
- Keep the style of the original text.

Literary → artistic, Legal → precise, Scientific → clear and objective.

- Revise and proofread.

Check grammar, spelling, punctuation, and clarity.

- Adapt to audience and purpose.

Example: A medical leaflet for doctors should be highly technical, but for patients it should be simplified.

5. Key Language Points in English–Arabic Translation

a. Word Order and Sentence Structure

- English prefers SVO.
- Arabic often uses VSO.

Example:

- EN: The teacher explained the lesson.
- AR: شرح المعلمَ الدرسَ.

b. Articles (a, an, the)

- English uses definite and indefinite articles.
- Arabic does not always require them.

Example:

- EN: A student entered the class.
- AR: دخل طالبٌ الصف.

c. Pronouns and Gender

- Arabic distinguishes gender and number more than English.

Example:

- EN: They are students.
- AR: هم طلاب (masc.) / هن طالبات (fem.).

d. Passive vs. Active Voice

- English uses passive voice often.
- Arabic prefers active when possible.

Example:

- EN: The book was written by Naguib Mahfouz.
- AR: كتب نجيب محفوظ الكتاب.

e. Idioms and Figurative Language

- Must be translated for meaning, not form.

Example:

- EN: Break the ice → كسر الجليد (figuratively: بدء الحديث لكسر الحاجز النفسي).

f. Punctuation and Style

- English and Arabic differ in punctuation rules.

Example:

- EN: “Hello, how are you?”
- AR: «مرحبًا، كيف حالك؟»