

Short Communication

A Comparative Study “Translatability of English Military Terms into Arabic Language by Translators with Military Backgrounds and Civilian Translators”

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the translatability of English military terms into Arabic and evaluates the ability of Arab translators to perform such translations. The study compares translations produced by civilian translators and those with military backgrounds, focusing on texts from various military services, including the Land Forces, Presidential Guard, Navy, and Air Force. Using validated texts approved by American military experts and their Arab clients, the research assesses the accuracy, consistency, and contextual appropriateness of translations through both quantitative and qualitative analyses. The findings reveal significant differences in translation quality between the two groups. Translators with military backgrounds demonstrated superior understanding and accuracy in translating military terminology, while civilian translators often struggled with technical aspects, resulting in less precise translations. The study highlights the complexity of military texts and the challenges of finding appropriate Arabic equivalents, noting inconsistencies in civilian translations that could lead to operational misunderstandings. The paper concludes with recommendations to enhance civilian translators' proficiency in military translation. These include establishing specialized training programs, encouraging collaboration between civilian and military translators, and developing comprehensive military dictionaries and glossaries in Arabic. This paper provides valuable insights into the importance of understanding military terms and expressions and highlights the need for targeted efforts to bridge the gap between civilian and military translators.

Keywords: Military Terms; Civilian Translators; Military Translators

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1. Introduction

The translation of military terminology is becoming increasingly important in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries due to several geopolitical, technological, and strategic factors. Firstly, the GCC region has experienced significant geopolitical changes and military engagements over the past few decades, including the Gulf War in 1991, the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, and ongoing conflicts such as the Yemeni Civil War. These events have heightened the need for accurate and efficient communication within and between military forces in the region^[1]. Secondly, the GCC countries have been modernizing their military capabilities by acquiring advanced Western technology and weaponry. This modernization process necessitates the translation of complex technical manuals, operational procedures, and training materials from English into Arabic to ensure that local military personnel can effectively use and maintain new equipment^[2]. Accurate translation is critical to avoid misunderstandings that could lead to operational failures or safety issues.

Furthermore, the GCC countries are increasingly participating in international military coalitions and alliances. Effective communication and interoperability with allied forces require a common understanding of military terminology, which is often in English. Translating these terms into Arabic accurately ensures that GCC military forces can operate seamlessly with their international counterparts^[3]. Additionally, the strategic importance of the GCC region, given its vast oil reserves and economic influence, means that maintaining security and stability is paramount. Accurate translation of military documents and intelligence reports is essential for informed decision-making and strategic planning to protect national interests and respond to potential threats^[4].

Based on the above discussion, this paper aims to investigate the lack of studies conducted on military translation in the Arab world, especially in the academic field. The studies conducted so far focus on military personnel's experience during their army service or after retirement. Therefore, this paper will investigate different military translations using samples from various academic institutes in the Arab world. The goal is to highlight the differences in military translation work conducted by different translators from different Arab nationalities and backgrounds. As a researcher in the transla-

tion field and a former military officer, I hope to contribute to bridging the gap and clarifying some of the ambiguities in the field of military translation. In conclusion, the translation of military terminology in the GCC countries is crucial due to the region's complex geopolitical landscape, the need for modernization and interoperability, and the strategic importance of maintaining security and stability. These factors underscore the growing importance of accurate military translation in the region.

2. Literature Review

Newmark^[5] states that translation is the replacement of a written message or statement in one language with the same message or statement in another language. Therefore, military translators/interpreters must be bicultural and bilingual with deep knowledge of technical military expressions to provide the same equivalence and image^[6]. In this regard, many Arab Military Academies have issued booklets, manuals, and dictionaries for military expressions^[7]. These academies have played a significant role in Arabizing and distributing the translation of these military terms.

Alshehab^[8] conducted a study comparing the translations of military expressions between the Jordanian and Iraqi armies from English into Arabic. He used a list of 94 military terms selected from military dictionaries and pamphlets used in Jordan and Iraq. The results showed significant differences between the Arabic equivalents. Jalabneh^[7] conducted a questionnaire and interviewed several Jordanian Armed Forces staff (JAF) of different positions, responsibilities, and ranks, focusing on the importance of translation, the types of message forms handled by military translators, and the quality of military translation. He suggested guidelines and approaches to enhance the efficiency of military translators. Al-Smady^[9] investigated two sets of 50 military terms. The first set was modified by the Academy of the Arabic Language in Jordan, while the second set was proposed by members of the Jordanian Armed Forces. The results indicated that the terms proposed by users were more acceptable than those Arabicized by the Academy.

Recently, some GCC countries have begun to renew, restructure, reform, and rewrite doctrines and equip their armies. This has increased the need for professional Arab translator teams. These teams consist of members from dif-

ferent Arab countries with various experiences, education levels, dialects, and military and civilian backgrounds. These differences can lead to the production of unacceptable and incomprehensible military terminologies for the end-users (clients).

The differences in translating military terms from English into Arabic will be investigated based on this. Two different military-translated texts from English into Arabic will be used in this paper. The texts are taken from a military manual translated by both civilian and military background translators. The translators are mostly Jordanian, with a few other nationalities such as Egyptian, Syrian, and Sudanese. The outcomes show an outstanding level of translation for the translators with military backgrounds, while the translations conducted by civilians showed several issues due to a lack of knowledge of military terms.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. The Sample of the Study

The sample in this study consists of several translators with and without military backgrounds. The translators participated in a major military translation project in the UAE. They were tasked with translating various types of military documents, including logistics, intelligence, operations, doctrine, legal materials, military geography, and terrain. This study examines a sample of two military translators with military backgrounds and two translators without such backgrounds. The goal of this selection is to highlight the differences between the two groups in their ability to translate military terms and expressions from English to Arabic.

3.2. Theoretical Framework

The study adopts a theoretical framework that integrates multiple models of translation analysis. These include the grammatical, cultural, interpretive, and text-typological models, which have been advocated by Arabic scientists and military experts^[10]. Each of these models has its benefits in military translation. For this study, the cultural model is primarily adopted, as it is particularly useful in analyzing the translation of military terms and messages, considering the cultural nuances and specific contexts of military communication^[11, 12].

3.3. Data Collection

Data collection involved selecting an English military text to assess the translators' ability to translate military terms into Arabic. The same text was translated by translators with both civilian and military backgrounds. To ensure a fair evaluation, a neutral professional translator with a military background was tasked with evaluating the translated texts. This evaluation focused on understanding technical terminologies, wording, accuracy, client satisfaction, and the overall flow of the text.

3.4. Research Design

The research design involved providing the same English text to both groups of translators (those with civilian backgrounds and those with military backgrounds) under identical conditions and for the same client. The translations were then analyzed and compared. The criteria for evaluating the Arabic translation of English military terms were based on Alshehab's established guidelines^[13, 14].

3.5. Analytical Methods

The analytical methods employed in the study included both quantitative and qualitative approaches. This dual approach enhances the validity and reliability of the research findings and provides a comprehensive picture of the phenomenon under study^[15]. Quantitative analysis involves statistical comparison of translation accuracy and terminology usage, while qualitative analysis provides insights into the contextual and interpretive nuances of the translations^[16]. By combining these methods, the study offers a robust analysis of the translation capabilities of both civilian and military background translators.

4. Results and Discussions

Civilian translators and translators with military experience may approach translating military literature differently due to their backgrounds, goals, viewpoints, and experiences. Civilian translators often have educational backgrounds focused on linguistics, languages, and translation studies^[17]. They may need to concentrate on learning specific military jargon to expand their vocabulary and gain expertise in military terminology. Conversely, translators

with military backgrounds usually possess military training and expertise, which includes knowledge of military jargon, practices, strategies, and security measures.

Civilian translators might not have direct exposure to the military context, which includes the chain of command, operational environment, and specialized vocabulary used in military manuals. Military translators, however, thoroughly comprehend the military environment, including tactical, strategic, and cultural factors that affect the language and content of military publications. They can accurately convey meaning since they are familiar with military lingo, acronyms, and terminology. Additionally, civilian translators may not always have access to classified material, or the security clearances needed to translate sensitive military materials. Military translators often obtain security clearances and background checks to handle sensitive or classified material and are trained to uphold secrecy and follow security procedures. Regarding the goal and target audience, civilian translators work on projects involving military materials for various purposes, such as educational, informational, or publishing^[12, 18]. They might translate military-related research articles, manuals, or publications for general audiences. Military translators translate official military documents such as orders, instructions, reports, and intelligence briefs, aiming

for clarity and accuracy to ensure successful communication within military units.

Moreover, the viewpoint or emphasis of civilian translators may differ as they translate for a general audience, considering the accuracy of the content and clarity of expression to ensure understanding by non-experts. Military translators, on the other hand, focus on precision, brevity, and military appropriateness in translations. They consider the operational context and the precise connotations of military language. Overall, while both civilian and military translators contribute to translating military literature, their distinct experiences, training, and objectives affect their approaches and proficiency in this field^[19].

Even though the terms are well-known as tactical expressions in Arabic military translation, academic audiences are not familiar with them. This is evident from the analysis of the translated text conducted by both parties, which reveals that the civilian translators were unable to accurately convey the meaning of the military terms in Arabic^[14]. On the other hand, a greater number of them did not provide Arabic military translations for these terms. It is stated that their level of English language ability is insufficient to make up for this shortcoming. Examples of the two sides' translations of the same text are displayed in the following **Table 1**.

Table 1. Comparison of Military English Terms Translated by Translators with and without Military Background.

Military English Term	Translators without Military Background	Translators with a Military Background
Company	“sharekah” شركة	“Saryah” سرية
Direct combat	“Irak mubasher” عراق مباشر	“qital mubashir” قتال مباشر
Close support	“da'em qareeb” دعم قريب	“isnaad qareeb” اسناد قريب
Air Defense Weapons	“asliha thed aljaw” أسلحة ضد الجو	“aslihat aldefa' aljawi” الجوي أسلحة الدفاع
Rifle	“selah” سلاح	“bondeqyeh” بندقيته
Field	“hagel” حقل	“maydan” ميدان
Commander	“maso'ol” مسؤول	“ga'ed” قائد
Squad	“kaliyah” خلية	“jama'ah” جماعة
Dragon missile	“sarook teneen” صاروخ التنين	“arook muthad le aldababat” صاروخ مضاد للدبابات نوع دراجون
Small arms	“aslehaj sagreerah” أسلحة صغيرة	“Al asleha al shaksiah” الشخصية الأسلحة
Tactical operation	“Amalyat tactekyah” العمليات التكتيكية	“alamalyat al ta'bwyah” العمليات التعبوية
Taps	“almuseqar” الموسيقى	“alsadah” الصداح

Matching the translations in the table above, the study concludes that the two parties to the identical text have a

great deal of comprehension. This result is due to civilian translators without military backgrounds being unfamiliar

with military vocabulary.

5. Conclusions

This paper has examined the translatability of military terms and expressions from English into Arabic by comparing the translated texts produced by translators with military and civilian backgrounds. The research highlighted the complexity and technicality of military texts, the difficulties in finding appropriate equivalents, and the lack of consistency and coherence in the translations produced by civilian translators. The study revealed significant differences in the translation of military terminology and usage across different military-related services and branches.

The findings suggest that translators with military backgrounds possess a deep understanding of the content, terminology, and usage of military expressions, enabling them to provide more accurate and precise translations compared to civilian translators who lack the necessary experience and knowledge. This paper underscores the importance of understanding military terms and expressions and the gap between translators with military backgrounds and their civilian counterparts. Based on these findings, the paper provides several recommendations to enhance the proficiency of civilian translators in translating military literature:

- a. Establish training programs and workshops for civilian translators to familiarize them with military terminology, jargon, and operational contexts.
- b. Encourage collaboration and exchange programs between civilian translators and military personnel to provide hands-on experience and practical insights into military translations.
- c. Develop comprehensive military dictionaries and glossaries in Arabic to aid civilian translators in finding appropriate equivalents for military terms.
- d. Encourage the publication of research and studies focused on military translation to bridge the knowledge gap and promote best practices in the field.
- e. Provide civilian translators with access to retired military officers and subject matter experts to consult on complex military translation projects.
- f. Promote advanced translation technologies and tools to assist civilian translators in handling technical military texts.

By implementing these recommendations, civilian translators can enhance their understanding and proficiency in translating military texts, thereby improving the quality and accuracy of military translations in the Arab world.

There are numerous military dictionaries and manuals available in different Arab armed forces. This paper aims to provide useful insights for translators with civilian backgrounds to help them understand and cope with the differences in translating military terms into Arabic or vice versa. Additionally, this paper highlights the difficulties and challenges in finding appropriate equivalents for military terms. The main significance of this paper is that it enhances the ability of civilian background translators to match the proficiency of their colleagues with military backgrounds. This study is limited to several translators who participated in the translation of a military project conducted in the UAE. Additionally, the number of terms used might be insufficient due to security restrictions from the clients who own the military manuals. However, the terms provided should be enough to validate the findings to some extent.

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Conflict of Interest

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