

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TRANSLATION AND WRITING PERFORMANCE OF ARAB ADVANCED EFL LEARNERS

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### **Abstract:**

*The present study aimed at investigating the relationship between literary translation and argumentative writing. The initial sample consisted of 60 advanced translation students. After administering Oxford placement test (OPT), the study selected 40 students based on their OPT scores. The instruments used in the study included an Oxford Placement Test, Evaluative Criteria Checklist for ESL Argumentative Writing and a short story entitled "the ninny". The literary translation test and argumentative writing test were administered in two sessions and the results of the tests were tabulated for further analysis. To test the hypothesis, Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was performed. The study findings showed that there is a significant relationship between literary translation and argumentative writing performance of Arab advanced EFL students. It is concluded that Translation of literary works is effective for the development of learners' argumentative skills.*

**Key words:** *Literary Translation, Argumentative Writing, EFL Learner.*

### **Introduction**

Translation is defined as "The replacement of textual material in one language by equivalent textual material in another language" (Schjoldager 2008: 17). However, most translators opine that translation entails much more than that. Normally, translation has several goals with diverse audiences and consequently, the same single text might have various translations. Initially, at the early stages of acquiring translation, numerous learners mistakenly justified that translation could be a word-for-word process; therefore, they would perceive translation as a mechanical approach. It is believed that translation is regarded as a dynamic human activity; hence, the text translated into the target language ought to be composed in a rhetorical style which is expected to persuade, move, and provide reasons or influence readers, requiring the same language effect as that of the source language. However, this might not be formed without applying the expertise portraying human reasoning.

According to Bassnett (2002), "the failure of many translators to understand that a literary text is made up of a complex set of systems existing in a dialectical relationship with other sets outside its boundaries has often led them to focus on particular aspects of a text at the expense of others" (p.80). The main challenges of literary translation are chiefly associated with consideration of source text as well as target text. In fact, the literary text has exclusive qualities in comparison with non-literary texts, posing a lot of challenges to translators of literary texts. For instance, despite automatization, the literary texts' poetic language has as an obvious function on foregrounding. The foregrounded linguistic structures could violate the norms of standard language, and consequently their translation does need to provide equal patterns which are not familiar in the target language. Furthermore, some linguistic features are implied and understated, where such characteristics are often ignored by literary translators (Huang, 2011).

To produce a creative argumentative essay, the author should make use of an appropriate style to generate rational pertinent ideas which are logically related and arranged benefiting from writer's language, and world competencies as well as strategic competencies (Bachman, 1990). The importance of

argumentative writing is widely accepted; however, its use in academic courses is rarely the central problem for educators. Theories of literacy claim that if students are taught to write, they will be more actively involved in literacy learning. As Hillocks (2002) noted, some decades before, the most widespread method of teaching writing was to concentrate on mechanics of writing and teaching grammar was the essential mean to learn how to write. This raw approach was sharply criticized, since it could not accomplish learning.

Argumentation is the informal discursive skills involved in providing claims and supporting these with indications (Toulmin, 1985). It is a reasoning skill essential to someone's ability in critical thinking, problem-solving, justification of offered solutions, expressing thoughts and decision-making (Cho & Jonassen, 2002). In general, argumentation is associated with the art and science of civil discussion, persuasion and dialogue (Glenn, Miller, Webb, Gary & Hodge, 2004).

### **Statement of the Problem and Significance of the Study**

Translation plays a substantial role for writers who deal with foreign language texts. Not a single person can reason that translation is not a writing practice. One more challenging issue, in the process of translation of literary works, which is concentrating on the issues related to the text styles, is that the translated text should go beyond word-for-word translation and elements of writing styles should be considered in advance (Toury, 1995); since the gist of a literary text lies with the writers' conceptualization of the message that if not translated based on this fine conceptualization cannot compete with the original text.

Another problem that is mostly seen in translated text from English to Arabic or vice versa, is that most writers cannot guarantee the originality of the themes. The problem is widely associated with literary text including short stories, novels and rarely poems. If translators are deliberately taught the art of argumentative writing, they will be able to come over the deficits that readers face when reading translated versions of literary works. Paying attention on the principles and elements of argumentative writing can certainly help translators approximate the original text and persuade readers of the themes in the original texts. This will also assist readers to grasp the theme of the argumentatively-written works.

The current study attempts to explore the relationships between Arab EFL students' argumentative writing skill and literary translation. Therefore, the results of the present study could help researchers, translation stakeholders, translation students and university professors to adjust, train, assess and develop their approaches to argumentative writing, translation courses, workshops and research studies.

### **Research Question**

The present study embarked on answering the following research question:

Is there any relationship between literary translation and argumentative writing performance of Arab advanced EFL students?

### **Review of Related Literature**

#### **Literary Translation**

To answer the question of "What is a satisfactory translation?" different theoretical perspectives, different translators, and translation researchers are needed. A perceptive theory is Reiss's functional theory, acknowledging that the principles "vary according to the text type" (Reiss, 2000, p. 69). Reiss emphasizes correspondence as well as equivalence at the communicative level that is the functions of the language of a text, stating that "The transmission of the predominant function of the ST is the determining factor by which the TT is judged" (Reiss, 1989, p.109). Reiss associates the language function relevant to a certain type of text:

- 1- Plain communication of facts: informative.
- 2- Creative composition: expressive.
- 3- Inducing behavioral responses: operative.

#### 4- Audiomedial texts (Munday, 2008, p.73)

Literary text as an “expressive” text type classified by Reiss (2000) has a set of typical features; the features associated with literary texts mainly include the following:

They have a written base-form, though they may also be spoken; they enjoy canonicity (high social prestige); they fulfill an affective/aesthetic rather than transactional or informational function, aiming to provoke emotions and/or entertain rather than influence or inform; they have no real-world truth-value i.e. they are judged as fictional, whether fact-based or not; they feature words, images, etc., with ambiguous and/or indeterminable meanings; they are characterized by 'poetic' language use (where language form is important in its own right, as with word-play or rhyme) and heteroglossia (i.e. they contain more than one 'voice' as with, say, the many characters in the Chinese classic *Shui Hu Zhuan / Water Margins Epic*); and they may draw on minoritized styles styles outside the dominant standard, for example slang or archaism. (Jones, 2009, p.152)

Correspondingly, literary texts are found in a written form, which are fictional and canonical, with an aesthetic function, focusing on the emotion manifestation, with poetic language, deviation and implied meanings. In literary translation, both the typical features of the source literary text and the effective components of the target viewpoint, including the linguistic and cultural differences as well as the target readers should be taken into account (Reiss, 2000).

Referring to his own involvement as a novelist and literary translator, Parks (as cited in Huang, 2011) clarified the price of translation to his authorial effort. Parks' inclination for translating over the writing classes should not essentially be taken as a refusal of the possible significance of such kind of classes, chiefly for nonprofessional writers and translators. Essentially, translation forces close text reading, contextual research together with a search for coherence and consistency. Stories are told by translators of an author's lack of intuition into their own writing when examined by the translator. However, there is no cause that writing classes cannot act out activities such as close reading and textual analysis with a stress on meaning construction and on managing the comparative indeterminacy of different genres. Although it is definitely the case that some genres are more determinate than others, e.g. contracts, as their utility is to thoroughly standardize human behavior in distinct conditions with enforceable authorizations for non-compliance, translation complications may lie in a different place, in this case, in the management of two legal systems for which inventive keys are often required. In considering writing and technical translation, Byrne (2006) even put forward that the overthrow of specialized translation can in itself be helpful if it improves the usability of the translation in the target culture. The example he provides is of instructional writings in which different kinds of specialized translation variation (e.g. switching between 2nd and 3rd person verbs, and main/subordinate clause ordering) are removed in the translation, in this manner prioritizing lucidity over stylishness of expression.

Purves (1986) took model essays in many countries on a common topic. Those compositions which were written in languages other than English were translated into English, as trying to retain the writing style and the essence of the original texts and found an outstanding difference between countries and remarkable correspondence and similarities within countries. He concluded that such differences in writing styles are the outcomes of schools conventions. Moreover he noted not to judge the writing styles of a country based on his findings since his subjects were still under education to write, and their writing styles did not echo those of proficient writers.

#### **Argumentative Writing**

Argumentation is a reasoning skill essential to someone's ability to critical thinking, problem-solving, justification of offered solutions, expressing thoughts and decision-making (Cho & Jonassen,

2002). In spite of its significance, it is not (however) a main concern in the school curriculum (Kellogg & Whiteford, 2009). Accordingly, a number of students enter colleges deprived of the skills required to think critically and to create convincing arguments. The propensity, further, is to overlook alternative views, making the argumentation prejudiced, lacking and possibly biased. To enrich learners' argumentation skills, instructors can benefit from a wide array of pedagogical interventions such as problem-solving tasks, direct instruction, competitive arguments, computer-supported collaborative argumentation (CSCA) software, translation tasks etc. (Cho & Jonassen, 2002). But, in the lack of an all-inclusive course in argumentation, it is frequently left to academic writing courses to try to mitigate the gaps existed in skills.

The necessity to develop students' skills to write argumentative essays is underlined by the latest results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (Applebee, Langer, Mullis, Latham, & Gentile, 1994); no American eighth-graders were competent to write an "elaborate" persuasive essay that expressed a position and offered a unified, detailed argument of the subject and alternatives. These results point out that the vast majority of learners are unprepared to write critically- specially, to recognize an issue of interest to themselves and their readers, take a position, and provide a logical, attentive perspective buttressed by robust details and opinions that forestall and react to counterarguments. These students are unprepared to write the serious, argumentative compositions and reports valued by educators, professors and managers (Yeh, 1998). On the other hand, narrative tasks requires the learner to provide a narration of what he or she reads, listens to or sees and demand lower levels of cognition (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996).

There are two general approaches to argument. The first is referred to as the Call for Action. Call for Action argumentative essays emphasize the establishment of the need for action and providing proof to support that need. The second broad approach includes Conflicting Positions. Here, argument essays admit the need for action but debate between two or more choices to satisfy the need. Occasionally, an argument which calls for an action will also propose a plan of action that calls for admitting a particular point as best satisfying the need, in effect, mixing the two approaches (Barnet, Sylvan, & Hugo Bedau, 1999).

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Subject selection in this study was done on the basis of proficiency level of the participants. The initial sample consisted of 60 advanced translation students. After administrating Oxford placement test (OPT), the study selected 40 students based on their OPT scores to collect data. The rationale for the selection of this sample of participants is that they had extensive initial translation education with a significant amount of practical educational translation experiences in the context of classroom. The justification for this component is to alleviate the issues of insufficient experience which could pose challenges to empirical translators. They were selected from an Iraqi university. They were 23 male and 17 female. Their age was between 20- 22 years old. Their native language was Arabic.

### **Materials**

The instruments used in the study included; (1) an Oxford Placement Test to select advanced students, (2) Evaluative Criteria Checklist for ESL Argumentative Writing (Nimehchisalem & Mukundan, 2011) (as a rubric) with some minute changes to fit in the context of EFL writers to assess the performance of Arab learners in argumentative writing were used. (3) For the translation material, a short story entitled "The ninny" was selected.

### **Treatment**

OPT was administered to 60 junior students of English translation a week prior to the start of the main experiment. After administrating Oxford placement test (OPT), the study chose 40 students based on their OPT scores to gather data. The test administration lasted for about 40 minutes where the placement

test has been administered in a single session. Accordingly, the students with the score between 161 and 197 based on OPT testing scale were determined as advanced language learners. Advanced translation students participated in the study in which quantitative analyses were used to gain the overall results and conclusions. All learners were asked to translate the short story “the ninny” into Arabic in a single session. Then their translations were rated by two qualified raters. The aim of rating translation by two raters was increasing the reliability of scores.

Like translation of literary texts, writing an argumentative essay was held in a single session. The participants were asked to write an English argumentative essay. They are required writing 250 words. The prompt for this task were as follows:

- Smoking in public places has to be banned.
- The most suitable age to have a right to vote.
- To what extent are electric vehicles a solution to global pollution?

The essays were scored based on the Evaluative Criteria Checklist for Argumentative Writing by two raters, and data were tabulated for further analysis.

### Results

This section first presents the descriptive statistics, namely mean, Std, minimum and maximum scores associated with student's performances on the tasks, AS illustrated in the following table.

**Table 1: Descriptive statistics of the students' scores according to gender**

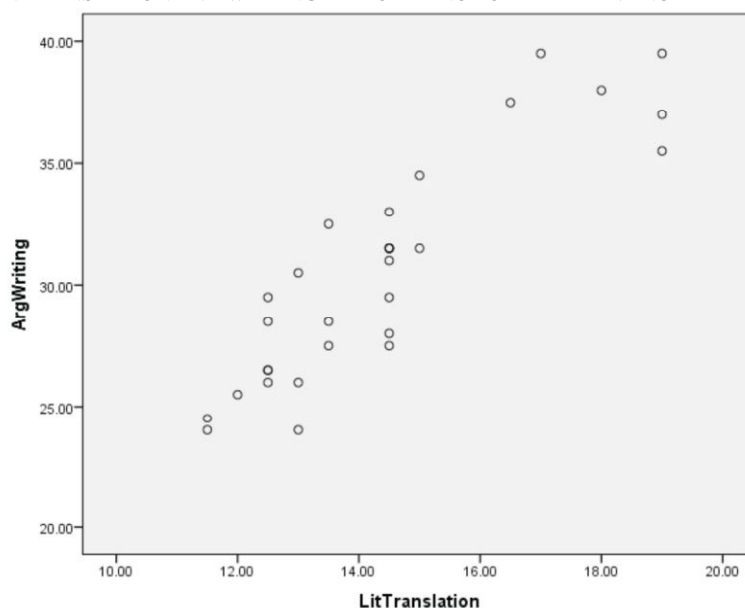
Task	Gender	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Argumentative	Male	32.80	4.26	27.60	39.70
	Female	31.57	4.75	25.00	39.50
Literary Translation	Male	15.05	1.80	13.00	18.00
	Female	14.80	2.69	10.60	19.60

As can be seen in Table 1, on the argumentative writing task, male students' mean score and standard deviation are 32.80 and 4.26 respectively. Also, their minimum and maximum score are 27.6 and 39.7 respectively. In addition, on the literary translation task their mean score and standard deviation are 15.05 and 1.80 respectively; and their minimum and maximum score are 13 and 18.

In addition, on the argumentative writing task, female students' mean score and standard deviation are 31.54 and 4.75 respectively. Also, their minimum and maximum scores are 25 and 39.5 respectively. In addition, on the literary translation task their mean score and standard deviation are 14.80 and 2.69 respectively; and their minimum and maximum score are 10.6 and 19.6.

### Investigation of the Research Question

Regarding the research question, the relationship between literary translation and argumentative writing performance of Arab advanced EFL students was explored. To test the hypothesis, Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was run. However, the study ran preliminary analyses to make sure that the assumptions of normality, homoscedasticity, and linearity are not violated. The results are provided in the following section.



**Figure 1: Scatterplot of argumentative writing and literary translation scores**

Interpretation of output from scatterplot is as follows:

Step 1: Checking for outliers: There is no significant outlier in the scatterplot.

Step 2: Investigating the distribution of data points: Nearly, all the points are neatly arranged in a narrow shape which suggests quite a strong correlation.

Step 3: Determining the direction of the relationship between the variables: The direction of an imaginary line is upward which indicates a positive relationship, i.e. high scores on argumentative writing are associated with high scores on literary translation.

Since the distribution of scores on the scatterplot are investigated and it is shown that the relationship between the variables is linear, and that the scores are evenly spread in a cigar shape (Pallant, 2005), we can proceed with calculating Pearson's correlation.

**Table 2: Descriptive statistics of students' scores on argumentative writing and literary translation tasks**

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Argumentative Writing	32.1851	4.5054	40
Literary Translation	14.9257	2.2451	40

**Table 3: Correlation coefficients between argumentative writing and literary translation**

		Argumentative Writing	Literary Translation
Argumentative Writing	Pearson Correlation	1	.856**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	40	40
Literary Translation	Pearson Correlation	.856**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	40	40

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The relationship between Argumentative writing and Literary translation was investigated using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. As discussed, preliminary analyses were conducted to ensure that the assumptions of normality, homoscedasticity and linearity are not violated. There was a strong, significant, positive correlation between the two variables,  $r = 0.856$ ,  $n = 30$ ,  $p < .0001$ , with high levels of argumentative writing ability associated with high levels of ability in literary translation. Therefore the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis stating “There is a significant relationship between literary translation and argumentative writing performance of Arab advanced EFL students.” is confirmed.

### Discussion and Conclusion

The goal of the present research was to investigate the relationship between literary translation and argumentative writing. It showed that there is a significant relationship between literary translation and argumentative writing performance of Arab advanced EFL students. It is concluded that Translation of literary works is effective for the development of learners' argumentative skills. Based on the test of the hypothesis, the results showed that the Arab students' argumentative writing scores were significantly correlated with their literary translation scores. This finding is line with Cho and Jonassen (2002), who noted that literary translation, as a pedagogical treatment, could improve learners' argumentative skills. Such a strong correlation can be the outcome of the nature of literary translation as well as argumentative skills, both of which demand higher-order information processing and cognitive ability. Cho and Jonassen (2002) enumerated the goals of an argumentative task as enriching learners' critical thinking, problem-solving, justification of offered solutions, expressing thoughts and decision-making. Howsoever, regarding Arab learners' performance, apart from the main procedure of data analysis, the most distinguishing element which was observed in most of the female participants included clauses that expressed thoughts, feelings and opinions, and those which transferred examples on the topic of the tasks. Howsoever, little similarity was seen among female participants' writings considering the equivalent terms and expressions. Considering the male participants, the most prominent feature was their effort to offer solutions to a way-out of the complication of the topic. However, in comparison with female learners, there was more congruency between the argumentation scores and choice of equivalent terms and expressions.

Referring to the rubrics filled for each student and a brief interview with the raters, it was explored that the first class of criteria (important/very important) including coherence, cohesion, effective argumentation and syntax had the lowest weight of scores for the whole sample of participants in both

groups. This is consistent with Kellogg and Whiteford, (2009), Applebee, Langer, Mullis, Latham, and Gentile (1994), and Yeh (1998) who contended that in spite of the significance of argumentative writing, it is not valued in the educational curricula. However, in the current study the students' strength in argumentation lied with the criteria of usage, mechanics, intellectual maturity, and essay length. It was to investigate the possible relationship between translators' performance in argumentative writing due to long periods of practice in literary translation course. In the present study, the researcher had the opportunity of having learners who were going to pass courses related to literary translation. However, elsewhere it is not clear that such a period of treatment, as a formal university course maybe at hand.

Curriculum designers, as significant actors of the context of language learning, can and should focus on this aspect of literary translation to encourage the goals which are associated with witting courses. For example inclusion of translation programs within the university curricula in a way which looks beyond the classical methods of translation, proposing and providing proper translation materials with the help of educational managers and other stakeholders are only part of the heavy tasks of curriculum designers. It is recommended that conducting a well-designed longitudinal study (over a year and above) on the criteria of coherence, cohesion, effective argumentation and syntax may certainly reveal the detailed effects of literary translation on learners' argumentative writing performance. Here it is argued that the results of the present research are highly dependent on the time period of the treatment.

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