Conference Paper

English Non-Generic Negation: A Problematic Area for Arabic Translators

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Abstract

The present paper aims to show that the appropriate textualization into Arabic of English non-generic negation by the Adverbials (namely *too* and *hardly/barely/scarcely*) can be a problematic area for Arabic translators. The textual data is extracted from several published translations in an attempt to show what procedures translators follow when encountering such negation and how successful they are. While the findings provide solid evidence for the serious mishaps (about 34.2% of the renderings involve one kind of problem or another) that Arabic translators experience in this area, the critical discussion unravels several textual procedures that can capture the subtleties inherent in this kind of adverbial negation.

Keywords: generic negation, non-generic negation, English, Arabic, translation.

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1. Introduction

Negation, whose universality is unanimously confirmed in the existing literature on human language ([9, 17, 18, 20, 25], among others), is a unique property of human language: "Negative utterances are a core feature of every system of human communication and of no system of animal communication" (Horn and Kato, 2000: 1). Linguists ([8, 17, 21], among others) usually divide negation into two types: explicit negation and implicit negation.

Similarly, there have been several studies which deal, among other things, with the linguistics of negation in Arabic, where negation is also divided into explicit and implicit negation [4–6, 23, 24]. Al-Makhzumi (2005: 265), for example, defines negation as "a linguistic category which is opposed to affirmation and intended to disprove or deny the truth value of a proposition". While explicit Arabic negation employs negative particles, implicit negation uses grammatical devices such as interrogatives and conditionals.

2. Review of Literature

While English verbal negation is uniform in nature, as it only employs the negative particle *not* in such negation, its Arabic counterpart is highly diversified. In terms of translation, there are only very few studies on the translation of negation. Apostolatu and Apostolatu (2012) deal with literary translation of English negation into Romanian. Dendane and Dendane (2012) refer to the one-to-many correspondence between the English particle *not* and the many counterparts in both standard and vernacular Arabic. Li (2017) points out the difficulty Chinese EFL learners face when expressing adverbial negation by *too* due to its Chinese counterpart, which functions as an intensifier.

A similar mishap may occur in English-into-Arabic translation. Farghal and Almanna (2015: 27) briefly examine negation while discussing syntactic features in translation. It is argued that the negation embedded in *too* can pose a challenge because it requires a translation procedure that recovers negation in Arabic, whether explicitly or implicitly.

1. I think you've been too busy to notice where I have been.

'aḏḏunn 'ana-ka kunta maššuulan jiddan li-tulaahiẖa 'ayna 'anaa

think (I) that-you be-you busy very to-notice where I

"I think you were too busy to notice where I am".

Al-Ghazalli (2013) discusses the translation of Arabic implicit negation in a poorly-written paper. Apart from the poor quality of this study, Al-Ghazali unjustifiably argues for unpacking Quranic implicit negation in rhetorical questions. According to his misconception of rhetorical questions, the Quranic verse *hal yastawii al-'a'maa wa-l-basiir* [Q equal the-blind and-the-sighted] is erroneously rendered as a generic rather than a rhetorical question by Quran translators as in Yousef Ali's *Can the blind be held equal to the seeing* (p. 135) and M. Pickthal's *Are the blind and the seer equal* (p. 133). Therefore, he claims, implicit negation should be made explicit as in *Are the blind and the one who sees equal? Definitely, this is not true* (p. 139).

3. Research Method

This is an empirical study based on the extraction of ample textual data involving English adverbial/determiner negation along with their target Arabic counterparts from existing works and their translations. The textual data (270 examples) features two types of markers of adverbial negation (*too* and *hardly/scarcely/barely*). The study provides both a quantitative and a qualitative analysis of the data. The sources of the textual data include five series of Harry Potter (HP, henceforth) by J. K. Rowling, namely

Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone (1), *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Askaban (2)*, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire (3)*, *Harry Potter and the Order Phoenix (4)*, and *Harry and the Deathly Hallows (5)*. The first two are translated by Sahar Mahmoud, the third and fourth by Rajaa Abdullah, and the fifth by Ahmed Mohammed (see references for complete information). The textual data sources also include *the blue Flower* (BF) by P. Fizgerald, 1996 (translated by Ali Suleiman 2015), *The Fault in our Stars* (FS) by J. Green, 2012 (translated by Baseel Intwan 2015), *The Help* (TH) by Stockett, 2009 (translated by Hassan Al-Bustani 2010)), *The Future: Six Drives of Global Change* (GC) by Al Gore, 2013 (translated by Adnan Gergeos 2015), and *the Making of Economic Society* (ES) by R. Heilbroner 1962 (translated by Rashid Al-Barrawi, 1976).

4. Discussion

In terms of the type of negative marker, the English corpus is distributed as shown in Table 1 below:

TABLE 1: Distribution of English negative markers in the corpus.

	Marker	Frequency	Percentage
1	Too	100	61%
2	Hardly	34	20.8%
3	Scarcely	19	11.5%
4	Barely	11	6.7%

4.1. Adverbial negation

Apart from the more generic negation by negative markers such as *not*, *no* and *never*, adverbial negation is mainly performed by the negative adverbs *too*, *hardly*, *scarcely*, and *barely*. These negative adverbs equip the utterance with an inherent negative orientation that needs to be accounted for when translating into other languages, Arabic in our case. The following discussion sheds light on the procedures Arabic translators resort to when dealing with this subtle area of negation which does not formally exist in Arabic.

4.2. Negation by too

The negative adverbial *too*, which is the most frequent in the data (100 occurrences), calls for a variety of translation procedures which may or may not involve the use of generic negation in Arabic. The data shows that Arabic negation by a generic negative

particle is recovered in 47 out of 100 cases, while implicit negation procedures are employed in the remaining 53 cases. As can be noted, the discrepancy in choosing between the procedure of generic negation and that of implicit negation when rendering *too* negation is insignificant.

4.2.1. Recovering generic negation

Examining the recovery of generic negation, it is noted that there are three main procedures adopted by Arabic translators: negation by simple or complex structures (18 cases/38.29%), unpacking negation by coordination (17 cases/36.17%), and negation by indicating degree of attribute (12 cases/25.53%).

To start with negation by employing simple or complex structures (which is the most frequent in this category/38.29%), it is noted that translators may succeed in capturing *too* negation using this procedure, as can be noted in the examples below:

> 2. I was too late to save the girl. (HP/2)
>
> lam 'astati' 'inqað-l-fataati fi-l-waqti-l-munaasib
>
> not be able saving-the-girl-in-the-time-suitable
>
> "I couldn't save the girl at the right time".

As can be observed, in (2) the translator has managed to properly recover Arabic generic negation by nominalizing the verb *save* (saving) and the verb *drive away* (driving away) in the English infinitive clauses. The English complex structure may be maintained in Arabic by employing the subjunctive case (which corresponds to the infinitive in English). For example, (2) above can be rewritten as *lam 'astati' 'an 'unqiða-l-fataata fi-l-waqti-l-munaasib* [not be able that save(I)-the-girl in-the-suitable-time] to mean the same thing, i.e. 'I couldn't save the girl at the right time'.

There are few cases (3 out of 18 instances), however, when the translator's recovery of Arabic generic negation does not convey the nuance of adverbial negation properly, as can be witnessed in (3) below:

> 3.... but Harry was too used to this to care. (HP/3)
>
> .... wa-laakina haarii lam yahatam bi-haaðaa
>
> and-but Harry not care with-this
>
> "... but Harry didn't care about this".

As can be seen, while the translator has managed to convey the general meaning in (3) by recovering Arabic generic negation, he has failed to do justice to the subtlety of

the negation expressed by *too.* In (3), the negation in the Arabic utterance corresponds to English generic negation by *not,* viz.... *but Harry didn't care about this.* Hence, the subtle focus of English negation is lost.

To capture the inherent full force of English negation by *too* here, the Arabic rendering in (3) may be rephrased as follows:

4.... wa-laakinna haarii lam yahtam li-ta'awwudi-hi 'alaa haaðaa

and-but Harry not care because-used-he on this

"... but Harry didn't care because he was used to this".

Unpacking *too* negation by a coordinate Arabic structure featuring explicit negation comes second in frequency at 36.17% (all from HP series). It proves to be a workable procedure, as can be observed in the following example:

5. Harry was too deeply asleep to hear her. (HP/4)

haarii kaana ɣaariqan fii nawmi-hi fa-lam yasma'-haa

Harry was sinking in sleep-his so-not hear-her

"Harry was deeply asleep, so he didn't hear her".

The translator in (5) has successfully managed to capture the focus of *too* negation despite the fact that she resorts to Arabic coordinate structure. In fact, the use of coordinate structure for unpacking the meaning of *too* negation has proved workable in all the cases in which this procedure is employed.

The third procedure (which indicates the degree of the attribute in question) accounts for 25.53% of the examples in this category. Semantically, it corresponds to awkwardly rephrasing *too* negation by using the phrase *to the extent that* with negation by *not* in English, viz. *John was too short to touch the ceiling* may awkwardly be rephrased as *John was short to the extent that he couldn't touch the ceiling.* In Arabic, this procedure proves very useful for rendering *too* negation. The following example is illustrative:

6. Professor Trelawney seemed too tipsy to have recognized Harry. (HP/5)

badat al-'ustaaðatu triilawnii maxmuuratun li-darajati 'anna-ha lam ta'rif haarii seemed the-professor Trelawney drunk to-extent that-she not know Harry "Professor Trelawney was drunk to the extent that she didn't recognize Harry".

4.2.2. Employing implicit negation

Apart from a mixed bag of erroneous translations/under-translations (16 instances/ 30.19%), there are three main procedures here for capturing the meaning of *too* negation: employing the comparative form (16 instances/28.30%), employing negative verbs (11/20.75%), and indicating degree of attribute (10/18.87%).

The procedure using the Arabic comparative form emerges as very useful for handling *too* negation. The comparative Arabic forms *'af'al min* [more of an attribute than] and *'akbar masdar* (verbal noun) *min* [more of verbal noun than] here capture the nuance that the force of X's attribute goes beyond the capability of Act Y, e.g. *'aðkaa min 'an yuxda'* [cleverer than that (he) be deceived] and *'akθara ðakaa'an min 'an yuxda'* [(has) more cleverness than that (he) be deceived] which both idiomatically translate into *Ali is too clever to deceive*. Following is an example from the corpus:

7.... because it was too long to memorize. ((FS)

... li'anna-ha 'atwalu min 'an tuhfaða ɣayban

because-it longer from that be learned by heart

"... because it was longer than it could be memorized".

The second procedure utilizes negative verbs/verbals to relay the meaning of *too* negation. This is a familiar procedure in English as well as in Arabic to express negation implicitly rather than explicitly. For example, 'the act of denying doing something' implies 'the act of not admitting doing it'. Consequently, this procedure constitutes an important option when translating negation in general and *too* negation in particular. The example below is illustrative:

8. Anna dies or becomes too ill to continue writing it. (FS)

'aana maatat 'aw balaɣat min-al-maradi haddan haala bayna-haa

Anna died or reached from-the-illness degree prevented between-her

wa-bana-l-'istimrara fi-l-kitaabati

and-between-the-continuing in-the-writing

"Anna died or reached a degree of illness that prevented her from continuing writing".

The implicit negation in (8) is achieved by the use of the negative verbs *haala* [prevented] and *yafuuqu* [exceed], which both imply propositions employing explicit negation in Arabic.

The third procedure employs the degree of the relevant attribute as a marker of implicit negation by using the degree formulas *min + masdar* [verbal noun], e.g. *from the-smallness* [i.e. too small] and *verb/adjective + 'alaa* [on], e.g. (*grow*) *old on* [i.e. too old]. Observe the example below:

9. Fines for violations were too small to be effective,... (ES)

fa-l-ɣaraamaat-u 'an-il-moxaalafaati kaanat min-aṣ-ṣ-iɣari bihayθu

so-the-fines from-the-violations were from-the-smallness so

faqadat faa'iliyyata-ha

lost(they) effect-their

"The fines for violations were so small that they lost their effect".

Finally, we have the mixed bag, which includes mistranslations/under-translations that account for 16/53 instances (a full 30.19%) in the cases of implicit negation. The example below is illustrative:

10. It is still far too cold to undress at night. (BF)

laayazaalu-t-taqsu baaridan jiddan li-xal'i-θ- θiyaabi fi-l-layli

still-the-weather cold very to-take off-the-clothes in-the-night

"The weather is still very [too] cold to take off clothes at night",

11. maazaala-t-taqsu-l-baaridu yamna'u-naa min xal'i malaabisin-aa fi-l-layli still-the-weather-the-cold prevent-us from taking off clothes-our in-the-night

"The cold weather still prevents us from taking our clothes off at night".

To close this section on translating *too* negation, Table 2 presents the results reported in the discussion.

4.3. Negation by hardly/scarcely/barely

The sample of these negative adverbs (which is extracted from BF, FS, GC, and ES, to the exclusion of HP) includes 34 instances of *hardly*, 19 of *scarcely* and 11 of *barely*, coming to 65 instances. These adverbs share the fact that they communicate a negative orientation when used in English sentences. That is why they are often interchangeable albeit they may be sensitive to normality conditions, i.e. one may sound natural in one context, while another may not. For example, *John was barely 17 when he joined college* is natural, whereas *John was scarcely 17 when he joined college* is not. In terms

Table 2: Frequency and percentage of procedures for explicit and implicit negation in rendering *too* negation.

No.	Translation Procedure	Frequency	Percentage
1	*Explicit negation*	47/100	100%
	a. simple/ complex structures	18	38.29%
	b. unpacking by coordination	17	36.17%
	c. indicating degree of attribute	12	25.53%
2	*Implicit negation*	53/100	100%
	a. using comparative form	16	28.80%
	b. using negative verbs	11	20.75%
	c. indicating degree of attribute	10	18.87%
	d. mixed bag (mistranslations/under-translations)	16	30.19%

of translation, the focus is on relaying the negative orientation which is shared by all of them.

The data shows three main procedures the translators have employed in rendering the negation by these adverbs: explicit negation (28 instances/43.75%), vernacular بالكاد (20 instances/31.25%), and implicit negation (12 instances/18.75%). The remaining cases go for mistranslation (3 instances) and omission (1 instance), together 6.25%.

Arabic negation by explicit negative particles emerges as the most common translation procedure for rendering the *-ly* negative adverbs, which clearly indicates the translators' awareness of their negative orientation. However, the coding of this orientation in Arabic seems to be a challenging task. In fact, more than half (16 out of the 28 cases/57.14%) involves under-translating this adverbial negation by rendering it into what corresponds to negation by *not* in English. Consequently, the subtle nuance of this type of negation is lost in translation.

Let us start with cases where the adverbial negation is accounted for properly in Arabic (12/28 instances/42.85%). The following example is illustrative:

12.... this little kid who could barely walk... (FS)

... haaðaa-t-tiflu-s-saɣiiru 'allaðii laa yakadu yam šii...

this-the-kid-the-little who not hardly walk

"... this little kid who can hardly walk..."

The translator of (12) has successfully employed a negated *yakadu*, viz. *laa yakaadu* [not hardly], which exactly captures the meaning of the *-ly* negation in (12).

However, *-ly* adverbial negation does not seem as straightforward as (12) may suggest. While capturing the notion of negation in general, almost 58% of the Arabic

renderings (16/28 instances) fail to account for the nuance inherent in *-ly* negation. Instead, this kind of negation is erroneously relayed as Arabic negation that corresponds to English negation by *not*, thus amounting to serious under-translations. Following is an illustrative example:

13. The children of large families hardly ever learn to talk to themselves aloud,… (BF) lam yata'allam 'awlaadu-l-'aa'ilaati-l-kabiirati 'an yatahaddaθuu 'ilaa 'anfusihim not learned children-the-families-the-big that talk to themselves bi-sawtin masmuu-in… with-voice audible

"The children of large families did not learn to talk to themselves in an audible voice…"

By way of illustration, in (13) the translator obliterates the subtle nuance of the negation in *hardly* by opting for explicit Arabic negation by *lam* [not]followed by the main lexical verb *yata'allam* [learn], which back-translates into English negation by *not*, viz. *'The children of large families did not learn to talk to themselves…'*. To capture the negation inherent in *hardly*, one may need to employ a negated *yakaadu* viz. *laa yakaadu 'awlaadu-l-'aa'ilaati-l-kabiirati yata'allamuuna-t-tatahadduθa 'ilaa 'anfusihim bi-sawtin masmuu-in…* [not hardly children-the-families-the-large learn-the-talking to themselves with-voice audible] "The children of large families hardly learn to talk to themselves in an audible voice…".

The second procedure for rendering *-ly* negation is the employment of the vernacular negative adverb *bilkaad*, which is derived from the standard verb *yakaadu*. The question is whether it is appropriate to use a vernacular form when it is possible to utilize the standard negated *yakaadu*. What is surprising here the absence of this vernacular form in *Harry Potter* where the informal register may sanction it as well as the frequency of using it in the other works - it accounts for 31.25% of the *-ly* data (20/64 instances). By way of illustration, the example in (14),

14. I hardly know you, Augustus Waters. (FS)

'anaa bilkaad 'a'rifu-ka yaa 'aɣustus wuutarz

I hardly know(I)-you oh Augustus Waters

"I hardly know you Augustus Waters",

can readily be rephrased naturally in standard Arabic using the negated *yakaadu* as in (15) below.

15. *'anaa laa 'akaadu 'a'rifu-ka yaa 'aɣustus wuutarz*

I not hardly(I) know(I)-you oh Augustus Waters

"I hardly know you Augustus Waters".

Next we have the procedure of implicit negation which accounts for 18.75% in the *–ly* negation data (12/64 instances). They mainly employ *paucity* or *difficulty* expressions in an attempt to capture the negative nuance inherent in *-ly* negation. Consider the example below:

16. Auguste nowadays scarcely ever went out at all,... (BF)

fii miθli haaᶁihi-l-ʼayyaami kaana min-n-naadiri bi-nasbati li-ʼuuɣast

in like these-the-days was from-the-rarity as-regards-Auguste

ʼan taᶁhaba xaariji-l-manzili that go(she) outside-the-house

In (16), the translator successfully employs a paucity expression *min-al-naadiri* [from the rarity] to capture *-ly* negation. One should note that a negated *yakaadu* can be readily used for that purpose, viz. *fii miθli haaᶁihi-l-ʼayyaami laa takaadu ʼuuɣast taxruju min-al-manzili* [in like these days Auguste not hardly goes out from-the-house] "In these days Auguste hardly ever goes out".

To close this section, let us examine one mistranslation (out of 3) which are involving *–ly* negation in (17):

17. This hardly seems like a particularly exciting subject for historical scrutiny.

yakaadu haaðaa ʼašbaha bi-mawduuʼin muθiirin bi-wajhin xassin

hardly this like with-subject exiting with-face particular

li-bahθi-l-taariixiyyi

for-research-historical

"This almost seems like a particularly exciting subject for historical research".

To explain, the translator in (17) wrongly uses the affirmed rather than the negated *yakaadu*, which is an approximating rather a negating marker, i.e. here it communicates the message that 'X is almost Y'. To capture *-ly* negation, the translation should read *laa yakaadu haaðaa yabduu šabiihan li-mawduuʼin muθiirin bi-wajhin xassin li-bahθi-l-taariixiyyi* [not hardly this seems like with-subject exiting with-face particular with-the-research-historical] "This hardly seems like a particularly exciting subject for historical research...".

To conclude, Table 3 below presents the results reported in this section on the translation of *-ly* negation:

TABLE 3: Frequency and Percentages of Procedures for Rendering –ly Negation.

	Procedure	Frequency	Percentage
1	Explicit Negation correct under-translation	28 12 (42.85%) 16 (57.14%)	43.75%
2	Using بالكاد	20	31.25%
3	Implicit negation	12	18.75%
4	Mistranslation/omission	4	6.25%

5. Conclusions

Overall, the findings reported in Tables 2-3 support the predictive title of this study that non-generic adverbial negation is a problematic area for Arabic translators. Together, the Tables indicate that 56 out of the 164 examples comprising the textual data (about 34.2%) involve translational problems including erroneous renderings, under-translations, mistranslations, and inappropriate use of vernacular forms. This constitutes solid evidence that the pragmatics of this type of English negation is a challenging task in translation activity. Arabic translators, both professionals and more so student translators, need to be alerted to the fact that this type of negation, which formally does not exist in Arabic (and probably in several other languages), calls, in the first place, for recovering generic negation and, in the second place, for appropriately investing implicit negation.

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