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IRANIAN TRANSLATORS' PERSPECTIVE TOWARD CHALLENGES AND DIFFICULTIES OF TRANSLATING TEXTS



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ABSTRACT

The present study investigated the EFL translation students' attitude toward the difficulties and challenges of translations. The participants of the study were translation students of both genders were selected from Iran universities based on the convenience sampling. A questionnaire was the instrument being employed in this study. The questionnaires were distributed to them and the participants had to fill them carefully without any time limitation. The results of this study indicated that the majority of the respondents agreed that the translation challenges in texts are not only inadequate lexical knowledge, but involved in grammatical problems. That is to say, the most problematic area has been highlighted as little cultural backgrounds.

KEYWORDS

Translation, EFL Translators, Translation Challenges

RESEARCH PAPER

1. Introduction

In October 2008 an International Conference organized by the University of Oviedo, Northern Spain, gathered a group of leading specialists and professionals around the topic 'Translation in the Era of Information'. The event attempted to give prominence to the translation of information in the era of mass media, and, above all, of the Internet. More than ever before, information surrounds us as readers, listeners, viewers and consumers. Translators and academics from Europe, America and Asia discussed characteristics and translational aspects of informative texts. This introduction presents some of these features. Informative texts can be described as multimodal (Gu, 2006, Kress, 2008, Kress & van Leeuwen, 2009, van Leeuwen, 2006) since the verbal and visual components are intertwined to such an extent that it would be difficult to dissociate them. In his classification of multimodal texts, Gottlieb underlines that the combination of various layers provides them with their polysemiotic nature (2003), and argued that pragmatic texts often partake in more than one of the following functions; informative, involving and entertaining (2003, p. 172). The informative component characterizes the texts analyzed in this special issue, but it is not the only one. In fact, all of them participate to some extent in two functions, the informative function and the persuasive one (Halliday, 2004). Informative texts are also characterized by the presence of specialized information about concrete topics, issues, subject matters, objects, destinations, etc. Information here is specialized in that it refers to specific topics and requires a limited use of specific lexis. This might be shared with other genres such as academic papers, legal and judicial language or medical research. However, informative texts make, as stated, limited use of the specific jargon used in other fields. This use does not normally hinder the comprehension of the overall text by the average text-consumer. Informative texts come closer to the general 'understandable' version, that is, specialist knowledge is transformed into non-specialist information. In this sense, the translation of informative texts is quite distinct from the translation of technical and scientific texts, which require highly specialized knowledge on certain topics in both the source and the target languages (Kingscott, 2002).

Translating in general is a demanding job that entails more effort and exceptional potential. Translators encounter different problems while translating different texts. Although they may have professional skills in translating general texts, they may face certain difficulties when dealing with informative issues. English is the first foreign language in Iran's educational system, and English translation courses such as translation strategies, theories of translation, interpreting, translation of simple prose texts and translation of different types of texts (informative, literary, scientific, political, etc.) that have been taught in recent years in Iran. English language translation students must pass some years of study in the field of language proficiency, linguistics, and all the theories of translation and strategies of translation in various fields, but the graduated students still have many problems in translating Persian texts in to English (Abbasi and Karimnia, 2011). Investigating the problems and difficulties of Persian-English translation is not an entirely unexplored topic, since similar studies have been carried out earlier. That is to say, these studies has been done on evaluation of some fields of translations. However, it seems that investigating informative translation has not been studied previously. Also, we are not aware that what the sources of possible challenges and difficulties are in translating Persian texts in to English. Therefore, the study is designed to carry out for finding out the unknown sources of challenges and problems in translating informative text from Persian to English, and the need to identify the most and the least problematic factors in translating informative text. The present project was an attempt to investigate the EFL translation students' attitude toward the difficulties and challenges of informative translations. Besides, this study specified the most and the least

problematic factors in translating the mentioned translations (informative). As we are witnessing the rapid pace of technology, it has taken a large portion of our new daily lives and necessitates the need for translators dealing with informative issues. This study has raised the necessity for translators who have both linguistic and specialized knowledge in such fields to render the terms in the best acceptable way without distorting the original meaning.

2. Literature Review

The process of translation is the stages through which the translator is going to move, they are the steps s/he has to accomplish while translating; starting from reading the SL text words and understanding them to looking for their equivalents in the TL, till putting it black on white; translating it. As stated by Bassalamah (2007, p. 118) that "translation results from an understanding of the source text, from its reading; and thus from its interpretation". So, the appropriate understanding would lead to an effective interpretation; finding the most appropriate equivalents, since the central problem of translation practice is that of finding a TL translation equivalent (Catford, 2006). Meaning that, the main interest of translation practitioners is that of understanding the source text meaning and working on finding the more appropriate expression in the target language. It goes without saying that, in the process of translation the translator has to be good and well-educated about both languages, the SL as well as the TL.

Al-Hamdalla (2005) stated four main difficulties in any translation; a) no two languages have exactly identical phonological, morphological, lexical, syntactic and semantic features, b) languages differ in terms of sentence arrangement, c) a translator is forced to front or move backward certain items, and d) the impossibility for a translator to completely master two languages; however, this problem can be resolved through specialized scientific committees.

El-Zeini (2007) identified six main problems in translating from ST to TT. Lexicon, morphology, syntax, textual differences, rhetorical differences, and pragmatic problems. A year later, unsurprisingly Bahameed (2008) identified these difficulties/problems as 'hindrances', and classified these hindrances of translation into lexical, prosodic, structural, and cultural hindrances.

Moharram (2010) conducted a study on student's errors while translating a text into English and found a considerable number of errors attributed to the inappropriate use of vocabulary, prepositions and gender; meaningless use of words; incorrect use of grammatical forms; use of long and incorrect sentences, and incorrect use of spelling. Moharram (2010) argued that these problems might be due to the interference of the mother-tongue, lack of vocabulary items and cultural differences in terms of concepts and values.

3. Method

Design of the Study

A quantitative research is one where numerical data is used in order to analyze the information which has been gathered (Ary et al., 2014). The present project was a quantitative one and the quantitative method was chosen for the design of this research to answer the research questions.

Participants

The participants of this study were M.A students of both genders (male and female). They were students of translation from English Department at Azad and Bahonar University. 60 translation students took part in this study. The participants were selected based on the convenience sampling.

Instrumentation

In order to gather data, a questionnaire was employed to test the learners' attitudes on challenges and difficulties of translating informative text. The questionnaire consists of 2 sections that was developed by Alsohmani (2013). The first part seeks the subjects' personal information, including gender, age, and their level of education. The second part contains 32 items that examines four sections related to "Insufficient lexical knowledge", "Inadequate knowledge of grammar", "Little cultural background", and "Inappropriate teaching atmosphere and methodology". The questionnaire was tested for validity and reliability. The total reported reliability was 0.81, and it was tested again by researcher for validity and reliability, before administering. The reliability of the questionnaire was tested by Cronbach Alpha, and the result of reliability was reported in the following chapter. In addition, to validate the questionnaire some steps were checked such as; suitability, measurement properties, and length of the questionnaire.

4. Results

The purpose of this study was investigating the EFL translation students' attitudes toward the difficulties and challenges of informative translations. Also, specifying the most and the least problematic factors in translating informative translations was another objective of the current project. So mean, variance, and standard deviation of the scores were used for analyzing data.

Descriptive Statistics of Questionnaire

In this section descriptive statistics analysis was conducted in order to evaluate different parts of questionnaire related to challenges and difficulties of translating informative text (Persian-English). The questionnaire consists of 4 sections related to "Insufficient lexical knowledge", "Inadequate knowledge of grammar", "Little cultural background", and "Inappropriate teaching atmosphere and methodology". Mean score, standard deviation, frequency, and percentage of each item were used in order to investigate every question. These results are presented in the following diagrams.

Analysis of the First Part

The first section "Insufficient lexical knowledge" was measured through 16 statements in students' questionnaire.

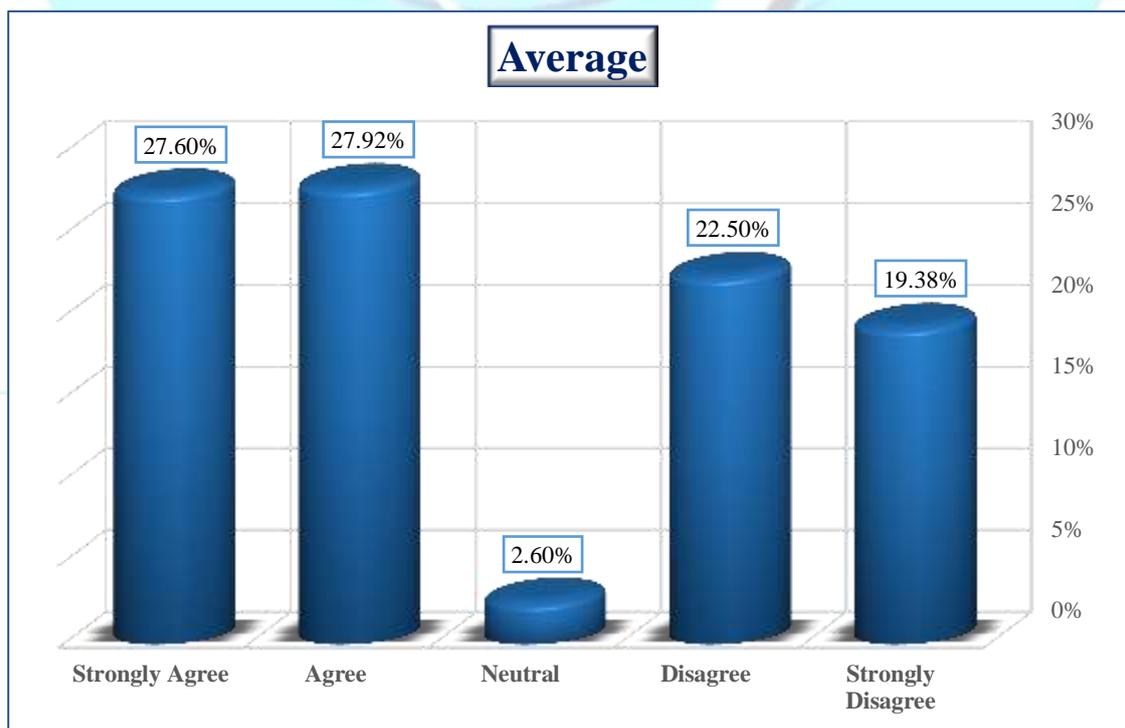


Diagram 1. Average of the Items Related to Insufficient Lexical Knowledge

As the above diagram indicates, more than half of the participants (55.2%) agreed and strongly agreed on the statements related to "Insufficient Lexical Knowledge", 41.88% of them showed their disagreements of these statements, and a low percentage of them (2.60%) had neutral opinion.

Analysis of the Second Part

The second section examined some items related to "Inadequate Knowledge and practice of Grammar".

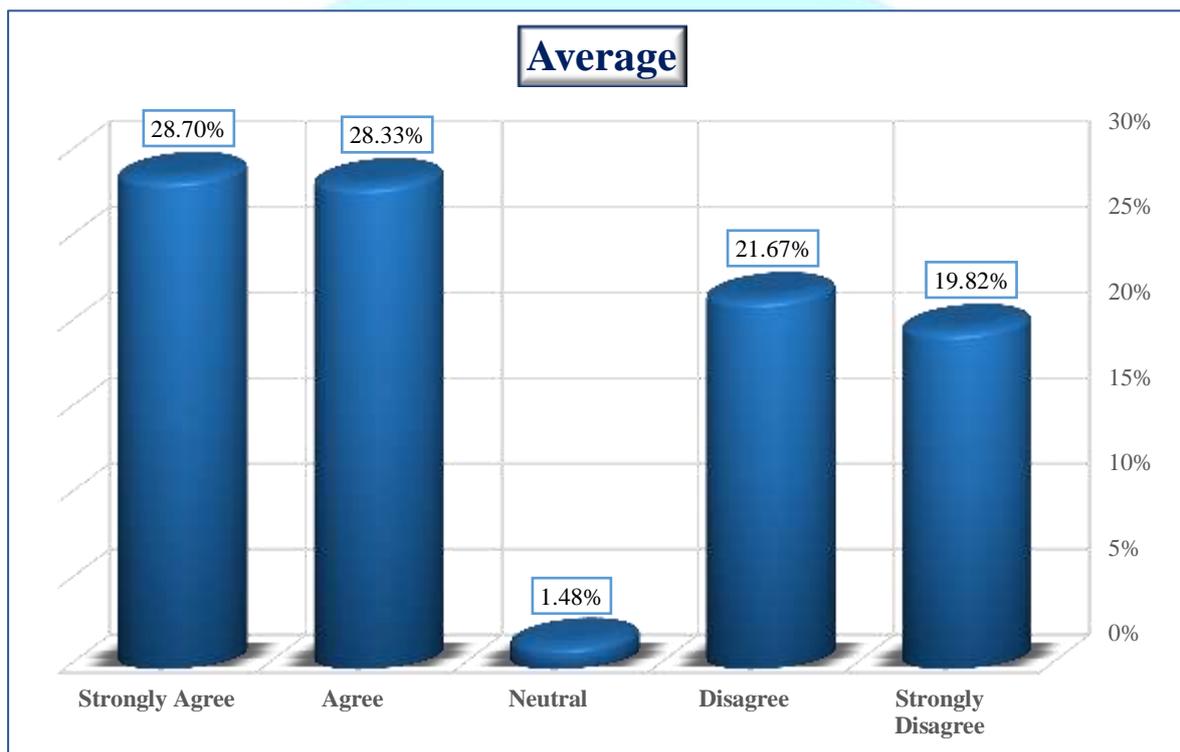


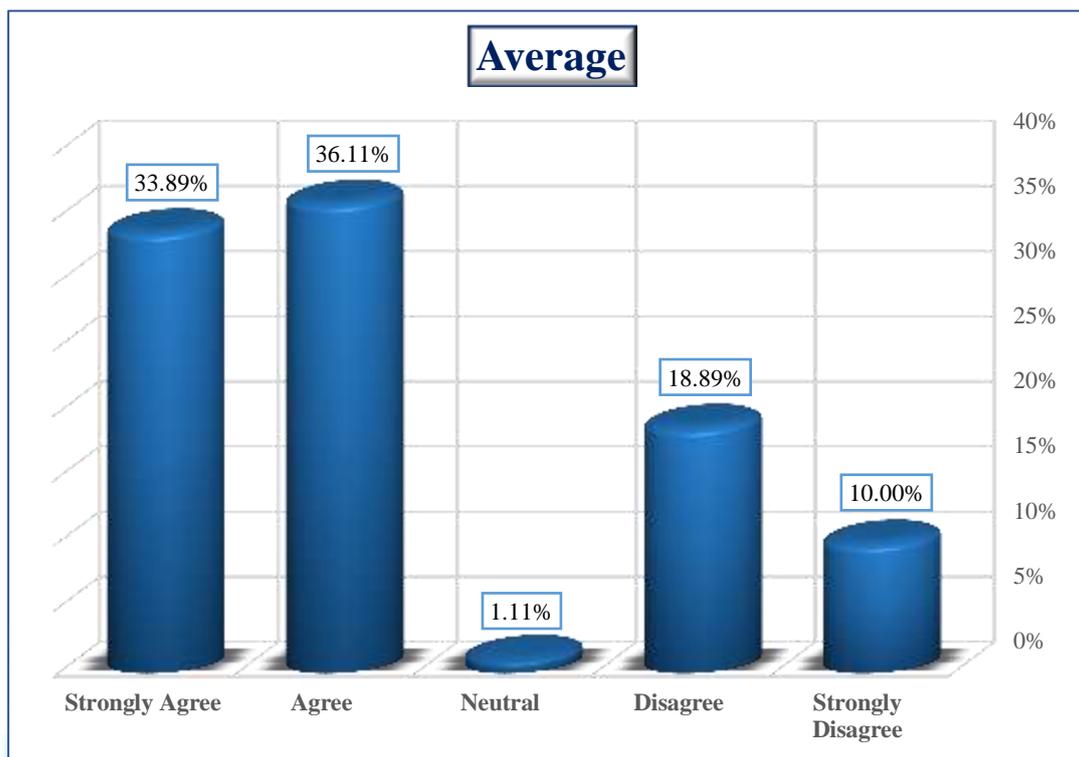
Diagram 2. Average of the Items Related to "Inadequate Knowledge and practice of Grammar"

Data analysis in the above diagram remarked that more than half of the translation students (57.3%) declared their agreements on the mentioned items. whereas, half of them (nearly 50%), and a low percentage (1.48%) had neutral perceptions.

Analysis of the Third Part

The third section of the questionnaire presents three items related to "Little Cultural Backgrounds" and the results are displayed.

Diagram 3. Average of the Items Related to "Little Cultural Backgrounds"



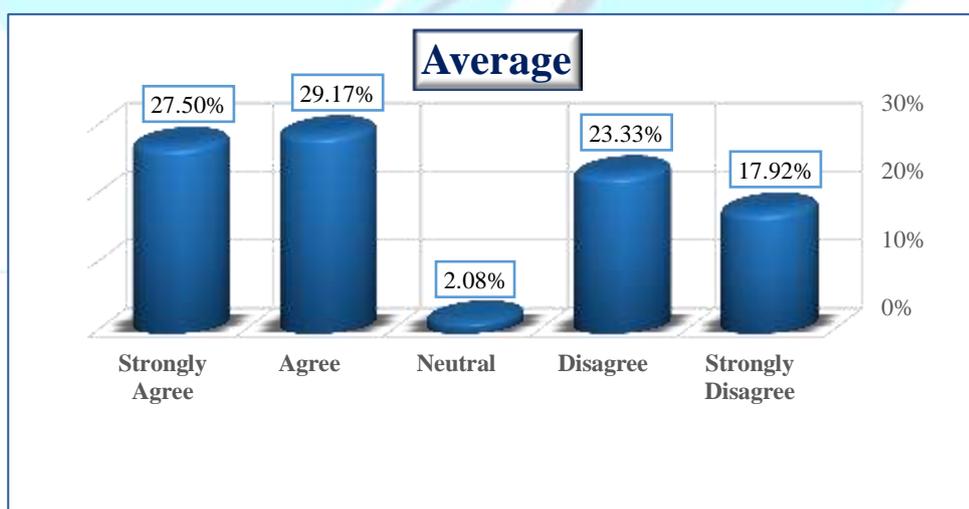
Based on the above diagram most of the participants, exactly 70% of them illustrated their agreements on the statements related to the cultural background. In the other words, most of them agreed on having a little cultural knowledge about target language. While, about 29% showed their disagreement on the mentioned items, and 1.11% had neutral ideas.

Analysis of the Fourth Part

The last section of the questionnaire evaluated some statements related to the Inappropriate Teaching Atmosphere and Methodology and the results are presented in the following diagram.

Diagram 4. Items Related to "Inappropriate Teaching Atmosphere and Methodology"

According to the careful analysis of all the items in the last section of the questionnaire, 56.67% of the teachers' responses were related to "agreement" options, and

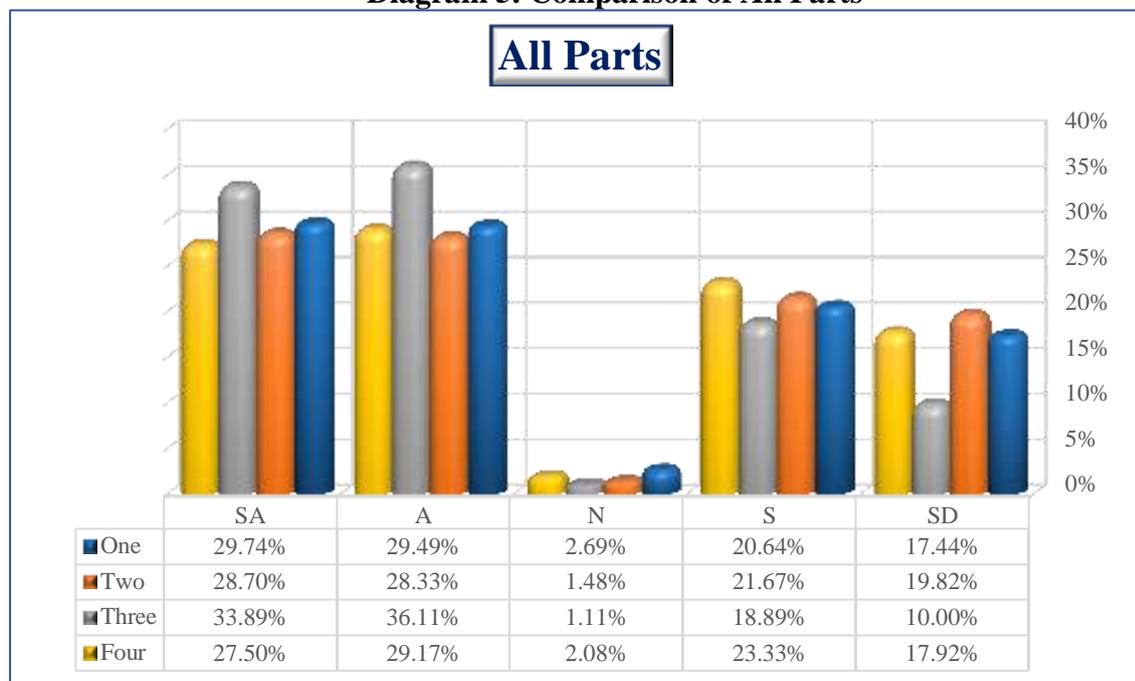


40.62% of them selected the disagreements options. Also, 2.08 of the answers were neutral .

Comparison of All Parts

The present part analyzed the least and the most problematic factors in translating informative text. Based on the following table and diagram, the third part of the questionnaire (Little Cultural Backgrounds) has recognized as the most problematic factor. However, according to the analysis and findings the first part (Insufficient Lexical Knowledge) has identified as the least problematic factor.

Diagram 5. Comparison of All Parts



5. Discussions

Examining the Research Questions

The questions guiding the research are presented here, the first of suggested hypothesis is:

Q1. What are the major difficulties of translating informative text (Persian- English) from EFL translation Students' points of view?

As noted above, the first research question of the study highlighted the translation students' attitudes toward translating informative text. Descriptive statistics illustrated the participants' perceptions through 32 items (4 sections) relating to problems and difficulties of translating informative text. At first, the questionnaire investigated 16 items related to insufficient lexical knowledge. More than half of the students (almost 52%) believed that that abbreviations and acronyms are hard to translate, and nearly 62% of them focused on inappropriateness use of the English words. Almost 59% and 64% claimed that it is difficult to translate medical and political or economic respectively. Also, about 62% announced that translating affixes are difficult for them. While exactly half of the translation students (50%) assumed that it is not difficult to find suitable equivalence in the dictionaries of both target and source languages, but more than half of them (51.66%) considered that it is difficult to find an acceptable/appropriate meaning of the word according to the context.

Moreover, the analysis indicated that most of the participants mentioned that it's difficult to translate the religious expressions, compound word, texts with full of language expressions, and finding the exact words which fit the meaning in the L2. Besides, the other problematic areas as lack of the awareness of connotative meaning in the source language,

translating of words with more than one meaning, and translating old English words which are not currently are specified by the participants of the present study.

The second evaluated area in translating informative text were related to inadequate knowledge and practice of grammar. A high percentage of the respondents assumed that translating prepositions, passive sentences, and adjectives are difficult for them. In addition, more than half of them proposed that being different structures in both languages, breaking down Persian sentences in order to make them short in English, and making links between sentences are difficult for translating. Furthermore, more than half of the subjects of this thesis declared they found some problems in translating some English tenses and translating negations.

The third investigated field in translating informative text referred to "little cultural backgrounds". According to received information, most of the participants remarked that lack of cultural background of the English language, translating of some English proverbs, and having less awareness of the connection of some idioms are the most difficult items.

Eventually, the last section of the questionnaire analyzed some statements related to inappropriate teaching atmosphere and methodology. According to the data analysis, more than half of the participants focused on the large number of students in the class and not teaching systematically at the university as the problematic factors of teaching atmosphere. Also, they mentioned that the absence of practicing translation in the classroom and the absence of specialist instructors in the field of translation lead to have difficulties and problems in translating. In a nutshell, due to the descriptive analysis, it was found that there are some difficulties and problems in translating informative text from translation students' perceptions, as most of them reflected their agreements on the questions related to the problems and difficulties of translating such text. However, a few of the participants demonstrated their disagreements on some of the questionnaire' items.

Q2. What are the most and the least problematic factors in translating informative text?

The present part analyzed the least and the most problematic factors in translating informative text. According to the related diagram, the third section of the questionnaire (Little Cultural Backgrounds) has recognized as the most problematic factor. However, according to the analysis and findings the first section (Insufficient Lexical Knowledge) has identified as the least problematic factor.

6. Conclusion

This study revealed some challenges which have faced translation students in translating informative texts. The researcher has highlighted the problems and difficulties by four areas. In the other words, this project concluded some causes for difficulties and problems in translating informative text. The first one was "insufficient lexical knowledge". According to the findings, most of them stated that abbreviations, acronyms, and affixes are hard for them to translate. Also, they referred to translating the religious expressions, compound word, texts with full of language expressions, and finding the exact words which fit the meaning in the L2 as the problematic items. Besides, the other problematic areas were identifies as lack of the awareness of connotative meaning, translating of words with more than one meaning, and translating old English words. The second problematic area related to "inadequate knowledge and practice of grammar", which translating prepositions, passive sentences, adjectives, some English tenses, and negations were difficult for them. At last, the most problematic area has been highlighted as little cultural backgrounds followed by inappropriate teaching atmosphere and methodology. To sum up, we can state that culture plays a very vital role in translation and translators critically need to develop substantial awareness of L1 and L2 cultures. This cultures awareness, however, is achieved only when

translators are linguistically equipped with sufficient knowledge of the SL and TL; otherwise, finding equivalent words, according to Larson (1984) could often be challenging.

The results of the current study are consistent to some extent with other relevant empirical findings in the literature. Moharram (2004) conducted a study on student's errors while translating Arabic into English and found a considerable number of errors attributed to the inappropriate use of vocabulary, prepositions abbreviations. Also, incorrect use of grammatical forms and use of long and incorrect sentences were the other problematic areas. Moharram (2004) argued that these problems might be due to inappropriate teaching atmosphere, lack of vocabulary items, and cultural differences in terms of concepts and values.

Moreover, Bassnett (1980) believed that differences between cultures stand as a barrier before translators. Also, culture for Larson (2008) is "a complex of beliefs, attitudes, values, and rules which a group of people share (p.431)", and this is really hard to achieve in non-native English countries. The most problematic area has specified as "cultural background". Therefore, translators need to familiarize themselves with the culture of target languages before they start translating. As the culture varies from one country to another even if they speak the same language. Additionally, cooperation between translators should be established as it would help in coping with such challenges. Moreover, translators should have drafting background to carry out their job more successfully. Institutions teaching translation professionally should be established. Through this research it is an attempt to cover the greater part of translation aspect. The researcher tried to talk about the current problems of translation.

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