Translating Arabic Verb Repetition into English

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Abstract
This paper examines the translation of Arabic verb repetition into English where repetition is generally mostly avoided. The verb in Arabic is usually repeated to indicate a previous general or specific situation, an assertion, or a reminder of a previous state or event indicated by the main verb (Holes, 2004; Atiq, 1974). For the purposes of this paper Atiq’s categorization of verb repetition in Arabic is applied to translation teaching to undergraduate students. Working on translation tasks of literary and media texts, the conclusion is that verb repetition in Arabic is best avoided (deleted) in English.

Keywords: Arabic, deletion, translation didactics verb repetition

Cite as: Hassan, A. J. (2015). Translating Arabic Verb Repetition into English. Arab World English Journal, 8 (1). DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol6no2.11
Introduction
Translation can be defined as a process on a language with the aim of producing meaning in another language. As such, translation involves different and often interrelated aspects and levels of language. Particularly undergraduate students of translation often find it difficult to cope with all aspects of translation at the same time. In such cases, students may be assisted by presenting them with parcelled up elements of language, mostly the source language, and then shown practical ways of handling them in the target language. This practice-driven method approach meets the general goal of translation as achieving the same communication of the source language in the target (Newmark, 1988).

In general, most theories of translation provide a basket of similar strategies to deal with linguistic elements through translation, albeit often with different labels (Munday, 2001). As they embark on their first courses, most undergraduate students of translation are introduced to the following four main strategies:

- **Literal translation**: rendering on the level of words, phrases and sentences by providing the corresponding equivalents in the target language.
- **Free translation**: conveying the meaning in a creative way; the translator can add information, ignore facts, or omit elements that are deemed to be not important.
- **Deletion/omission**: mostly used in free translation, deletion refers to the removal of what are considered unnecessary meanings, words, or full sentences, but on the basis that this does not harm or distort the overall text. Deletion is helpful in dealing with repetition and redundancy when translating into languages that do not favour such structures (Dickins, Hervey & Higgins, 2002).
- **Addition**: providing extra information in the target text for particular translational purposes.

In applied translation studies (ATS), the focus is on the usefulness and usability of teaching activities and associated theories, whereby the concern relates to “the relevance of the findings for the task at hand and the extent to which the application helps users to solve their problems (Rabadán, 2010, p. 8). Furthermore, in translation didactics or teaching, most researchers agree that particularly for early stages of training, the task should be on how ‘to go about’ translating (cf. Kelly, 2010). Here, the aim of classroom activities should perhaps focus on itemized elements that translation students can easily remember and locate when moving between their working languages, particularly if these happen to be drastically different as is the case of Arabic and English. Under the term of “task-based” translation didactics, insights and practices from foreign language teaching and learning have been used in the teaching of translation. Based on practical activities, the task-based method focuses on specific points or issues in designing translation courses, whereby class tasks and activities form “a chain of activities with the same global aim and a final product. On the way, both procedural (know-how) and declarative (know-what) knowledge are practiced and explored” (González-Davis, 2004, p. 23).

Within this context of practice-driven translation teaching, the aim of this paper is to explore how the linguistic aspect of verb repetition in Arabic can be handled when translating into English. Verb repetition is very common in Arabic, but not so in English. To this end, two texts from literary and media discourses were used with undergraduate students at two universities in the Arab World (King Fahad School of Translation and Ajman University of Science and Technology) over a number of years. This practice-based (task-based) method provided students...
translating arabic verb repetition into english

Repetition and Verb Repetition in Arabic

It is stating the obvious that languages differ in their lexical manifestations. Repetition, for example, is an intrinsic trait of Arabic as noted by almost all Arab and Western grammarians and linguists (cf. Van De Wege, 2013; Holes, 2004). Treated mostly at nominal levels and as a parallelism strategy, repetition in Arabic is used to serve “didactic, playful, emotional, artistic, ritualistic, textual and rhetorical functions” (al-Khafaji, 2005, p. 6).

In general linguistic research, repetition is discussed under cohesion, particularly lexical cohesion. In their “never aging” study of the English language, Halliday & Hasan (1976) devote a whole chapter to the description of various forms of lexical cohesion, which is defined as the repetition of lexical items in order to achieve a cohesive effect in a text. For them, there are two types of lexical cohesion: reiteration and collocation. Reiteration is a form of lexical cohesion that includes the repetition of a lexical item identical to another previously mentioned in the text. Reiterated items differ in the level of generality. In some instances, a reiterated item is identical to a previous one, while in others it is a general noun which refers back to an item introduced earlier in the text such as synonyms, near-synonyms and super ordinates. Collocations result from the occurrence of lexical items that stand in some kind of semantic relation to each other. They refer to various lexical relations that, unlike reiteration, do no depend on referential identity. Collocation lexical items tend to occur in the same environment to collocate with one another.

Halliday & Hasan (1976) also discuss other types of cohesion in English such as substitution and ellipsis. Substitution is commonly used in English to avoid repetition of a verb or a verb plus other elements in the clause. Consider example 1:

1. Hussein requested me to write his name correctly but I did not. Ironically, he did not protest as he used to do.

In this example, did not, which is a negated form of the verbal substitute "do", stands-for "write his name correctly", and do substitutes for the verb "protest". Substitution in both sentences is used to express cohesion in English.

Ellipsis refers to the omission of a lexical item or a group of lexical items as they are understood from the context and to avoid repetition. Consider example 2.

2. John was wearing a black jacket and Mary a pink dress.

In this example, the two classes are structurally related through the ellipsis of was wearing in the second clause, with cohesion established through this ellipsis.
Verb Repetition in Arabic
Repetition in Arabic has been studied by Arab linguists and grammarians as well as Arabists all the way back to Wright (1898). However, most Arab linguists have given priority to the semantic over the lexical dimension of repetition. It should be noted here that Arab linguists have not concentrated on the lexical repetition of the verb as such and instead examined it under the general heading of repetition.

Repetition (تكرار) involves the addition or reiteration of lexical items, phrases or sentences with the aim of adding to the meaning of an utterance, and for stylistic purposes. This addition can be a repetition of identical lexical items or different ones both of which are used to strengthen and corroborate the meaning conveyed by the utterance (cf. Al-Askari (1981); Al-Jarim & Amin (n.d.)). Consider the following Quranic Aya:

3. 
وإذ قال يوسف لأبيه يا ربت رني رأيت رحد عشا كوكبا ورلشمس ورلقما رأيته لي ساجدين. (آل عمران، آية 3)

Joseph said to his father: “Father, I dreamt that eleven stars and the sun and the moon were prostrating themselves before me.” (3: 3)*

In this example, the two occurrences of the verb رأى (to dream) are separated by other lexical items, and the verb repetition here underlines the meaning.

As outlined above, lexical repetition of the verb at the clausal and interclausal levels in Arabic has not been the focal concern in Arabic linguistics and grammar; rather it has mostly been examined at the semantic level. But Atiq (1974) provides a discussion of verb repetition in Arabic that can be termed user-friendly, particularly for students who usually find linguistic and grammatical texts on Arabic rather baffling and difficult to follow. Atiq sets four categories of verb repetition as follows:

General – specific (ذكر الخاص بعد العام)
According to Atiq (1974), the stylistic purpose of this category is to draw attention to the specific word and give it priority over the general meaning. Mentioned along with the general word in the same sentence, the specific word provides a focus on a particular meaning.

4. 
حافظوا على الصلاوات والصلاة الوسطى (البقرة، آية 238)

Be watchful over prayers, particularly over the prayer the hour of which approaches when you are pre-occupied. (2: 238)

5. 
يعلم الجميع كما يعلم كاتب هذا المقال ان زيدا كاتب كبير

Everybody knows, including the writer of this article that Zaid is an eminent writer.
In example 4, the afternoon prayer (صلاة الوسطى) is mentioned after prayers (الصلاة) which is a general word (the plural) that englobes all five Muslim daily prayers. The afternoon prayer is specified in the sentence to show its importance over the other prayers. The specific word occurs after the general. In example 5, the same situation occurs where the first (يعلم) has a general reference (to all), while the second occurrence has a specific reference (the writer of this article).

### Specific – general

In this category, a verb is mentioned first with a specific reference after which a second occurrence comes with a general reference. The specific word is included in and gives further emphasis to the general one.

6. أناكلم العربية كما يتكلمنا العرب

I speak Arabic as Arabs do.

In this example (6), the relationship that holds between the first verb (أتكلم) and the second (يتكلمنا) moves from the specific (I) to the general (all Arabs).

### Assertion (التاکید)

For Atiq (1974), assertion is realized by lexical repetition of a verb in the same sentence, and is used to corroborate the meaning expressed by the verb.

7. كلا سوف تعلمنا ثم كلا سوف تعلمون (التكاثر آيتين 3-4)

Surely you will soon come to know the vanity of your pursuits; again you surely will soon come to know how mistaken you are. (102: 4-3)

8. دخل البيت ودخله في منتصف الليل.

He came back home late at midnight.

In 7, the second clause (كلا سوف تعلمون) is repeated to reinforce and assert the meaning of warning expressed by the first clause. In 8, the verb (دخل) is repeated to assert the meaning of arriving late at night.

### Long separation (طول الفصل)

This category refers to a long separation between a verb and its repeated occurrence within the sentence. A long separation between the verb and other elements in the sentence (mostly the subject) comes as a result of a long serialization of the subject.

9. لاتحسن الذين يفرحون بما أوتو ويحبون أن يحمدون بما لم يفعلوا فلا تحسنهم بمفازة من العذاب. (آل عمران، آية 183)
Imagine not that those who exult in their deeds, and love to be enlogised for that which they have not done, that they are secure from punishment. (3: 183)

In this example, the negated verb (لاكنس ) is repeated for there are other elements in the sentence which separate it from the predication. The verb is repeated to refresh the memory of the hearer/reader.

Implications for Translation
The previous section has provided a synoptic discussion of verb repetition in Arabic. This section examines practical applications to translation from Arabic into English. The four categories provided by Atiq (1974) for verb repetition in Arabic as well as insights from the task-based translation teaching guide the analysis of the data.

The data comprise two texts from the discourses of literature and media. The first text, literary, is a short story by Abdessalam al-Ujayli, a Syrian short story writer. The short story is entitled من الخيل والنساء (Who shall I Kill?), and is taken from Al-Ujayli's (1979) collection (الخيول والنساء (Horses and women). This text is referred to as text A. The second text, media, is an article published in the early 1990s in al-Ahram newspaper. The article was titled سندباد مصر (The Sindbad of Egypt) and written by Ahmed Bahjat about the deceased Hussein Fawzi. This article, states the different qualities of this man who is referred to as the Sindbad of Egypt -this text is referred to text as B**. As stated in the introduction above, these two texts were used with undergraduate students at King Fahad School of Translation (Morocco) and Ajman University of Science and Technology (United Arab Emirates) over a number of years.

Below, each of Atiq’s (1974) categories is applied to both texts (A and B) and a decision about the appropriate translation strategy into English is provided. All translations into English were the agreed upon versions through class discussions with students, however I remain responsible for any errors or misrepresentations.

General-specific
As discussed earlier, the general-specific category of verb repetition in Arabic explains the kind of relationship which holds between verbs as well as nouns. This category of verb repetition does not seem to be frequently used as only one instance occurs in text A:

10
Text A

كما أخافتني صورة باصرة لحريق توقعته أن يشب من شرارة في الوقود المحملة به سيارة فيلفنا الصهريج

I was also scared by the vivid image of the fire which would break out if a spark ignited the fuel, which the tanker was carrying, engulfing us and it in flames.

In this example, there is repetition of the verb (يفف). The subject of the sentence is the same (لهيب) but there are two different objects (-na and -hu respectively). These two different objects determine the type of repetition that the verb-forms make in the clause. The meaning expressed in the second "specific" occurrence of the verb is included in the meaning of clause. The general-specific repetition of the verb in 10 can, and perhaps should, be avoided in translation into
English. Though it seems to perform an important role in Arabic, it becomes redundant in English, where ellipsis is used as a cohesive device (Halliday & Hasan, 1976).

**Specific-general**
Under this category, verb repetition is used to emphasize the concept expressed by the general lexical item as in the following two examples:

11

Text A

وفي احدي اللحظات خطر لي كما يخطر لكل سائق بضرورة لا شعورية اين مسرع أكثر مما ينبغي.

In a moment, like all drivers, I unconsciously realized that I was driving too fast.

12

Text B

و تحس اذا قرأت له او جلست اليه او تحاورت معه انك أمام قلب فيه قد من الحنو الذي يستوعب ويستوعب الآلاف معك

When you read him, sat with or talk to him, you felt the tenderness of his heart which encircled you along with a thousand others.

The type of relationships that hold between the repeated verbs in 11 and 12 are specific-general where the meaning of the first reiterated verbs is included in the second ones (occurrences). As for the general-specific category of verb repetition, Arabic verb repetition under this category is also avoidable (deleted) in translation into English.

**Assertion**
Verb repetition for assertion seems to be the most common of all categories. Verbs are repeated in different morphological forms to assert the meaning they carry and to achieve a cohesive role in linking parts of the clause; the relationship existing between the reiterated verbs differs. Consider examples 13 and 14:

13

Text A

هل طار لولب من جهاز دفين من أجهزة الكاديليرك فأطار توازن جهاز القيادة فيها

Was there a screw missing from one of the Cadillac's innermost parts which made the car go out of control?

14

Text B

ولكنه يكتب في أدب الرحلات مالا يكتببه أساتذة هذا الفن...

However, he wrote on adventure what the Master of this art never did...

The type of repetition involved in these two examples denotes assertion. In 13, the verb is repeated in two different morphological forms (طار and طار). This assertion is achieved in English by avoiding the verb repetition in the Arabic source. In 14, and unlike 13, the verb comes in the same morphological form (يكتب) in both occurrences, but the purpose is the same, namely to assert. As with 13, this verb repetition in Arabic is avoided in the English translation through substitution, a favourite type of cohesion in English (Halliday &
Hasan, 1976). The cohesive effect of the source text is maintained in the English target without repetition.

**Long separation**

This type of verb repetition is widely dealt with in Arabic grammar and linguistics. It involves the existence of a number of linguistic elements that separate the two occurrences of the verb. Consider the following two examples:

15

Text A

حينئذ سمعت الشيخ أحمد الذي اجني حتى اسد ذفقة الى الظهر المفعوذ الذي جلس عليه سمكت لصوت حاول أن يجعله هادئاً ولكن الالجاح كان بينا في نيراته.

At that time I heard Sheikh Ahmed who, so bent that he leant his chin against his seat, say in a persistent tone that he tried to make appear calm'.

16

Text B

وكان يقول ممن يسخرون من أسرى الطليبان في الحرب العالمية الثانية وكيف كانوا يعثرون معهم على آلات موسيقية ... كان يقول ...

He used to address those who derided Italian Prisoners in WWII, who were captured with Musical instruments in their possession, by saying...

In examples 15 and 16, the verb is repeated after a long serialization of the subject (operator). Repetition is used to remind readers of the action expressed by the verb. The repeated verb matches the first occurrence in terms of subject, tense and morphological form. Although this verb repetition is cohesive in Arabic, it should be avoided in translation into English, where the cohesive effect still holds in both examples.

This analysis, albeit not exhaustive, indicates that verb repetition in Arabic should be avoided when translating into English, which has other non-repetition cohesive devices that are as effective as repetition in Arabic. Table 1, below summarizes the occurrences of all verb repetition in both texts A and B, and in all the 25 instances avoiding repetition in English was the norm.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of repetition</th>
<th>Frequency of occurrence</th>
<th>Total 25</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Text A</td>
<td>Text B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General– specific</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific-general</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assertion</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long separation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The four categories of verb repetition are very much acceptable in Arabic as they contribute to the cohesiveness of the text. In English, on the other hand, repetition of the verb is often avoided through deletion or substitution strategies.

**Conclusion**

This paper has a practical aim. It has set out to examine an effective and common feature of the Arabic language, namely the purposes of verb repetition and the most appropriate way of rendering this Arabic-specific linguistic aspect into English. By introducing undergraduate students of translation to a user-friendly list of the major strategies of translation and the four categories of verb repetition in Arabic and then proceeding to translating authentic Arabic texts from different discourses (literary and media in the case of this paper), the learning outcomes were positive and in line with insights from task-based translation teaching. Avoiding verb repetition in English and seeking instead cohesive devices that are specific to this language were the two pieces of advice (guiding principles, if we wish to call them so) for students to remember.

In introducing students to the intricacies of translation from Arabic into English, the translation of the repeated verbs should be turned into something else (for example, substitution or ellipsis) which make the text hang together and the translation communicatively effective in English. So, verb repetition in Arabic should be replaced by other cohesion devices in English, mostly substitution or deletion. The next stage would be to check whether students would apply “reverse engineering” when translating from English into Arabic, a language that favours verb repetition?

**Notes**

* All English translations of the Quran used in this paper are taken from Dawood (1956).

** For text B every effort was made to trace the full text, unfortunately it was not possible to do so. So, the author fully acknowledges the copyrights of *al-Ahram* newspaper and Ahmed Bahjat as the author of the piece.

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