The Translational Force of Words: The Journey of "Come" and "Go" into Arabic

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Abstract

This study delves into the translational challenges Arabic translators face in preserving the dynamism and multifaceted meanings of 'come' and 'go' phrasal verbs during translation using machine tools. Though existing literature has focused on linguistic and cultural equivalence, the 'translational force' of specific words is still under-researched. The aim of this study is to verify the accuracy of the output across tools, and to conclude how effective these applications were in the given language pair. The study adopts a mixed methods approach with a survey used to identify the most frequently used machine tools for translation by 27 learners of Translation Studies at Shaqra University, Saudi Arabia. Thereafter, a set of frequently used phrasal verbs in English that use the root verbs 'come' and 'go' were translated by a convenience sample of 27 final year students of translation as well as by using the popular and free translation tools in the English-Arabic language pair. Results indicated that Saudi students enrolled in translation studies used MateCAT, Google Translate, Reverso to a limited extent, but relied more on online dictionaries for translation to and from English. In addition to this, translation of English phrasal verbs was found to be most accurate in MateCat and there too, accuracy in back translation was found to be more accurate in the case of the phrasal verbs formed with 'come' at the root than with 'go' verb. Finally, it was found that the translation students preferred 'soft tools' like English movies for learning, recall, and use of English phrasal verbs in practice. This study is expected to provide a deeper understanding of the concept of "translational force" and its implications for translating dynamic words in the English-Arabic language pair in the realm of machine-based translation tools.

Keywords: Come, Education, go, phrasal verbs, Research Work, soft tools, translation

1. Introduction

In the modern global dynamics, translation has come to be recognized as an important bridge connecting cultures, ideas, and philosophies, especially in the non-English speaking cultures (Baer, 2020). However, the act of translating is not merely word-for-word equivalence, as such a simplistic exercise may fail to convey the meaning intended in the source language (Baker, 2018). On the contrary, it involves intricate cognitive processes where translators grapple with the complexities of language structures, idiomatic expressions, and cultural nuances (Pym, 2023). Cross-lingual communication is an ever-evolving sub-field of Translation Studies, and this state of dynamism gives rise to new concepts whose intricacies demand scientific inquiry. Translational Force is one such novel concept that identifies certain lexical items in the source language as being more potent in terms of communicative value and versatility of use (Lee et al., 2019). As a result, these lexical items naturally bear more than one meaning and nuanced connotations. The English verbs are quintessential examples of this, especially when paired with prepositions and adverbials, in which case they can produce a variety of meanings in English (Geeraerts, 2009). The real challenge is faced in capturing the hidden connotations when such items are translated to, for instance, Arabic. The notion of "translational force" postulates that certain words, by virtue of their flexibility and dynamism, carry a unique communicative ability and are hence, open to translation confusion (Lee et al, 2019; Tanabe et al., 2020). The verbs 'come' and 'go', among a few others, in the English language exemplify this translational force, stemming from the wide range of polysemous meanings associated with them. The addition of prepositions and adverbials to these basic verbs gives rise to a multitude of meanings (Johnson & Levenson, 2019). Their translation into languages with distinct linguistic structures, such as Arabic, therefore demands more than lexical equivalence. Cross-lingual communication is an ever-evolving sub-field of Translation Studies, and this state of dynamism gives rise to new concepts whose intricacies demand scientific inquiry. Translators must delve deeper, ensuring the preservation of the essence and energy of these words.

Statement of the problem

Translation stands as one of the most formidable challenges in the field of linguistics. Across dissimilar language origins, the task of

transferring the nuances and essence remains daunting. "Translation is perhaps the most intricate event within the evolution of the cosmos," remarked (Lev ý, 2011). Rendering Arabic texts into English demands a profound bilingual proficiency, amplified by the substantial cultural and religious influences embedded within both languages (Almaaytah & Alzobidy, 2023). Studies reveal that while lexical errors prevail, grammatical, stylistic, usage, and phonological complexities also merit attention. Arabic, for instance, exhibits a higher degree of inflection compared to English. At the same time, words like 'come' and 'go' possess a dynamic range of meanings in English; capturing their essence and versatility in Arabic translations remains a challenge. Though seemingly basic, these verbs can pose a challenge to Arabic learners of translation, sometimes leading to mistranslation, attributable to the dynamism of these verbs.

Research questions

Broadly, the study endeavored to answer two questions:

- 1. What strategies do Saudi EFL students apply when translating English phrasal verbs of the 'come' and 'go' combination into Arabic?
- 2. How can translators effectively tackle the translational force inherent in the two English verbs, 'come' and 'go', whether with or without online tools?

2. Literature Review

The realm of translation has spurred numerous studies and spirited debates among theorists. A context relevant to the current inquiry is the paradigm theory of Kuhn, an American scientist and philosopher, propounded in his seminal work, "The Structure of Scientific Revolutions," which significantly shaped the landscape of sociology and philosophy of science (Pym, 2023). Central to Kuhn's assertion (1970) is the idea that a paradigm emerges from the achievements of esteemed individuals. The study also delineates two fundamental criteria as prerequisite for these achievements to qualify as paradigms. Translating literary works presents a challenge due to the diverse experiences and cultural nuances that characterize communities. This compels translators to differentiate between the form and content of literary expressions, where form contributes specific ideas while content adds others (Wagner, 2014). Further, in a genre like poetry where tension exists between form and content, achieving identical equivalence becomes nearly impossible (Al-Najjar, 1984). Moreover, between languages that have disparate origins such as Arabic and English, transposition of one script into another is itself challenging (Akan et al., 2019), as there are likely to be pitfalls spanning vocabulary, grammar, and application. Akan et al. (2019) delved into such multifaceted challenges involved in translating Arabic texts into English while also recommending potential solutions. Translation, being a nuanced and intricate discipline within language studies, presents significant hurdles, especially when transitioning from Arabic to English. Addressing both surface and deep linguistic relations demands a translator equipped with critical linguistic expertise (Campbell, 2014). The transfer of unique linguistic traits between these languages underscores the complexities inherent in translation. This study also confronted the complexities surrounding the translation of Arabic materials into English, seeking viable solutions grounded in considerations of readership, text, context, culture, and other contextual factors. Earlier, Al-Masri (2004) also delved into the semantic and cultural losses inherent in translating literary works from Arabic to English. Past research identified the inherent cause as the lack of equivalence between source and target texts, emphasizing formal over functional equivalence. The analysis suggested that these losses stem from an imbalance at both semantic and cultural levels, highlighting the significance of a semiotic equivalence approach. Linguistic and semantic losses occur when verbal cues are lost from the source text, impacting understanding or aesthetic values. Cultural losses involve obscure details related to social norms, religious beliefs, and ideological stances, arising from a lack of pragmatic equivalence. Therefore, Al-Masri (2004) recommended that translators prioritize addressing linguistic and cultural components' distinctiveness in the original text, ensuring unfamiliar elements are made familiar before undertaking translation. Mistranslation, literal interpretation, and surface-level understanding also lead to semantic losses, while cultural losses emerge from a lack of pragmatic equivalence at different levels. To mitigate these losses, Al-Hamdalla (1988) focused on the challenges of translation, specifically in relation to the Arabic classroom of translation studies and recommended that translation teachers advocate the use of real-world examples for Arabic-speaking translator trainees at the university level. It also discussed the advantages and disadvantages of employing translation in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classrooms and advised translators to provide target readers with contextual information to decode situations more effectively with consideration for the cultural implications of the original text. Collocation is yet another casualty in translation where the translator is not well versed with the target culture's nuances.

Ibrahim (2003) explored the difficulties encountered by Sudanese EFL university students when translating English collocations into Arabic and vice versa, as well as the factors contributing to these challenges. The research involved 26 Sudanese EFL students, aged 20 to 30, enrolled at Nahda College, Sudan. Data collection was based on a diagnostic test that carried two questions, and descriptive analytical tools were later used to derive results. The findings revealed that Sudanese EFL university students faced serious difficulty in translating collocations between English and Arabic. These challenges primarily stemmed from their reliance on literal translation methods and their lack of awareness of linguistic and cultural disparities between the two languages. It is these chasms that contemporary socio-linguistic theories target when they raise the question of intercultural translation, emphasizing hermeneutic concerns rather than strict faithfulness in translation. The modern cultural orientation scrutinizes how knowledge creation in one culture intersects with its interpretation and transmission in another. Cultural translation refers to the process of internalizing and reimagining an unfamiliar experience within its original cultural context. Bahameed (2007) identified the cultural pitfalls that translators faced between the Arabic-English language pair translation, highlighting the persistent culture as an obstacle in translation endeavors. However, the study emphasized that qualified

translators striving to overcome these obstacles can facilitate better understanding of foreign cultural attributes through intercultural translation. Given that deep cultural awareness is an important fulcrum on which the act of translation rests, the concept of translation, as a paradigm of cultural encounter is far from being a straightforward notion. While exploring translation theories, Al-Safi (2011) surmised that in the past three decades, the field has notably expanded towards a macro-level approach, encompassing entire cultural contexts. For more details regarding students' translation see (Alshargabi et al., 2022). Existing literature on translation predominantly focuses on linguistic and cultural equivalence (Torres, 2016). However, there is a gap in understanding the potence of certain words due to the dynamic possibilities in their usage and their impact on the translation process. For instance, Derrida (1985) touched upon the multiplicity of meanings in language but stopped short of examining its implications for translation. The concept of "translational force," though touched upon tangentially in some studies, remains largely unexplored, especially in the English-Arabic language pair. This study focuses specially on the verbs 'come' and 'go', which despite their ubiquity, haven't been extensively studied in the context of their varied meanings and the challenges they pose during translation, especially into Arabic (Al-Mahrooqi & Sultana, 2017). This gap in research underscores the need for a detailed exploration.

Translation methods

Literal translation

This type of translation maintains the grammatical structures of the SL and translates them to their nearest or most appropriate target language equivalents. However, connotation of utterances is ignored in this method (Newmark, 1988).

Faithful translation

This method maintains a balance between the literal meaning of the source word and the target syntactic structures. A faithful translation attempts to reproduce the precise contextual meaning of the original within the constraints of the target language grammatical structures. Cultural words are 'transferred' in this method and the source language grammatical structures are also deviated from in the translation. In the current study sample, there was no scope for faithful translation given the source language data as the sample reproduced Arabic translations of only the phrasal verb components in the exercise (Newmark, 1988).

Communicative translation

Contextual meaning takes precedence over all others in this type of translation and satisfies both content and language demands of the text. In addition, it pays attention to the cultural value while focusing on the central message. As per Newmark (1988), communicative translation is simple, clear, and concise while the style of such composition is natural. Dickins (2005) notes that communicative translation 'is produced, when, in a given situation, the ST uses a SL expression standard for that situation, and the TT uses a TL expression standard for an equivalent target culture situation'. Instances of communicative translation were not found in the data. The reason for this could be lack of exposure and practice in this approach as it would need great degree of proficiency in the target language for the participants to adopt it.

Semantic translation

According to Newmark (1982), in this method of translation too, the contextual meaning from the source text is targeted to be translated but not at the cost of the target language, in this way, the focus is more on maintaining comprehensibility in the latter. It may appear similar to communicative translation in this way, but differs in maintaining the aesthetic value of the source text, even if its meaning is compromised so long as the translated version appears natural in the target language.

3. Methods

Research design

This study took a mixed method approach to answer the research questions. —A translation test in line with the standardized evaluations that are administered by the University was given to students to evaluate their translation of the phrasal verbs formed with the roots 'come' and 'go'. The study was carried out at Shaqra University, Saudi Arabia in the first semester of academic year 2022-2023.

Participants

The researchers opted to collect the qualitative data from 27 students of Translation Studies from the first, sophomore, and final years of study for more comprehensible results. All participants were enrolled in translation courses. From personal experience the researchers are aware that translation students in Saudi universities use online tools and apps but to answer the thematic question and to examine the extent of this use, a set of 52 sentences was used in the physical mode to collect the preliminary data.

Instruments

A written translation test was administered simultaneously to a mixed gender group of 27 translation studies students at the university after obtaining due permission from the Deanship and sharing the study objectives and data protection policy with the participants. Qualitative data were collected from a convenience sample of 27 male students enrolled in the first, sophomore, and final year of the translation course. This is also the group that one of the researchers has been teaching since the beginning of the academic year. Participation was purely on voluntary basis. A fifty-two-item English phrasal verbs worksheet was administered online for these participants to translate the verbs at ease, the Google Form for the survey was accessible for two days, at the closure of which the data was duly loaded onto a spreadsheet for analysis.

Data analysis

The study adopted a simple statistical tool of frequency and percentages, tabulated the results obtained and thereafter analyzed them. All the translations reproduced by the participants were analyzed using Newmark's (1988) methods mentioned in his *A Textbook of Translation*.

4. Results

RQ1: What strategies do Saudi EFL students apply when translating English phrasal verbs of the 'come' and 'go' combination into Arabic?

Students adopted the following strategies while rendering the sentences given in the translation test.

Word-for-word translation

This type of translation maintains the word order of the source language; words are translated out of context according to their most common meaning. This method or type of translation takes the meaning of each word in isolation with focuses on the source language and the target made to follow it step by step. This is done in such a watertight manner that the grammar, semantic, and syntactical differences in the language pair components are ignored, but given its simplistic methodology, it is usually a method adopted by amateur translators. In the study data, such translations were found in as many as 27 translations. Though a small number, it shows that literal translation was resorted to by a few amongst the sample (Table 1). Some examples are:

pass by: Julie **came across** some photographs of her grandparents in the attic.

passed through: Julie **came across** some photographs of her grandparents in the attic.

they dispersed: I need to get my glasses repaired. They came apart when they fell off the table.

Another observation is that the score for the 'go' phrases is a little higher at 260 out of a maximum of 380 possible attempts. Some of the commonplace utterances such as *Children go back to school after the holidays*, *A bomb went off in a crowded restaurant*, *Sorry for interrupting. Please go on*, leaving the blank reverts, all participants scored a perfect 5 for the translations. This trend is conspicuous by its absence in the case of translation of the 'come' phrasal verbs. Moreover, in some instances, the participants offered more than one Arabic translation, demonstrating their efficacy with the application of semantic translation of English phrasal verbs.

for A bus went by without stopping واصل السير او سار بدون توقف

which means Police found a stash of firearms in an abandoned mine, while the original construction was: The police came upon a stock of firearms in a disused mine.

لقد فسد الحليب لا تشربه: The milk has gone off. Don't drink it.

يميل اليكس إلى الموافقة على أي شيء تقوله زوجته Alex tends to go along with anything his wife says.

She fainted when the news was announced but she came to quite quickly. أغمى عليها لما سمعت بالخبر لكنها سرعان ما تمالكت نفسها

Semantic translation

In this study, this method is the one most frequently used for translation. In the 'come' phrasal verbs, 252 out of a maximum of 380 attempts have been semantic translations with good accuracy interpreted from a score of 4 or more out of a maximum of 5 allotted to each clause. In all there were twenty clauses each for 'come' and 'go' phrasal verbs in English.

Table 1. Frequency and percentage use of methods of translation

Translation method	Frequency	Percentage
Word for word	27	3%
Literal	37	4%
Semantic	512	67%
No answer	184	24%
Total	760	100%

From the data above it is evident that the Saudi students lean heavily on semantic translation while translating the English phrasal verbs formed with 'come' and 'go' verb roots.

RQ2: How can translators effectively tackle the translational force inherent in the two English verbs, 'come' and 'go', whether with or without online tools?

The semi-formal written interview was used to gather data to answer this question. A set of six open-ended questions was in the physical mode to collect the preliminary data. This was administered simultaneously to a mixed gender group of 27 translation studies students at the university. Table 2 showed that the Saudi translation studies students occasionally used online tools to help with translation, and there too, the most frequent use was for translation form Arabic to English rather than the other way around.

Table 2. Students' dependency to translate the verbs "go" and "come"

Translation force	Percentage
Using app	52
Online dictionaries	39
The help of peers	2.7
Help of family members	1.8
The trial and error	4.5
Total	100

The most popular tool was MateCAT and the reason for its majority use is accuracy of output and the fact that they were introduced to this website early in their academic study and students found it more trustworthy. This was followed by Google Translate, and lastly by Reverso. However, out of participants, only 52% reported using any app, while 39% reported using an online dictionary instead, while the remaining sample either sought the help of peers (2.7), some sought the help of family members (1.8 %), the remaining (4.5%) used the trial and error method. The researchers, too, verified the accuracy of translation to and from the Arabic-English language pair and discovered that MateCAT was indeed the most accurate especially in back translation than the stand-alone Google Translate service or Reverso. To answer the research question, the participants reported that they found media like English language films the most effective in learning the nuances like phrasal verbs, especially the 'come' and 'go' combinations as conventional methods or translation apps only worked in the immediate environment but 'soft tools' helped them recall and use the language elements more proficiently.

5. Discussion

Phrasal verbs form an inseparable part of the native English speakers' diction, so much so that they sometimes replace formal expressions with phrasal verbs that convey the same meaning but in a more succinct and less formal way.

The study found that students applied three translation methods to translate the phrasal verbs 'go' and 'come' from English into Arabic. Semantic translation was the most applied method. This result means that students have good knowledge in translation. It is usually known that beginners in translation naturally adopt the word for word strategy most of the time. However, in this study, students paid attention to the context while rendering the phrasal verbs. This finding aligns with Chansopha (2023), who showed that the main translation strategy employed by students for phrasal verbs was semantic translation, which accounted for 80.9% of the cases. In contrast, only 17.8% of the cases involved the use of literal translation, and 1.3% of the cases were left untranslated. The study also reported that word for word translation was also adopted. This percentage, however, was very low. This finding reported that literal translation is adopted to convey meaning where the denotative meaning is required for comprehension.

The study also showcased that students of translation in Saudi Arabia used online dictionaries and applications to get the meaning of the words. This is confirmed by many studies which showed the students' preference to make use of technology for translation (Bin-Hady & Al-Tamimi, 2021; O'Neill, 2019; Xu & Wang, 2011). Xu and Wang (2011) reported that translation students currently depend more on electronic resources than non-electronic ones in their translation practice, primarily due to convenience rather than accuracy; and the use of online resources enhances translation efficiency.

Translation is a popular and over-subscribed course in Saudi Arabia as the opening up of the economy has highlighted the importance of English proficiency in economic activity and participation. A large number of studies on the various aspects including challenges at institutional level are being undertaken to identify and plug the loopholes. For instance, Jabak (2018) examined the translation challenges faced by Saudi undergraduates when working with Arabic to English materials. This qualitative investigation focused on understanding these difficulties and exploring strategies to address them. Using interviews and assessment tools, the study evinced multiple factors contributing to these issues and proposed various solutions. Despite the fact that these landmark studies in the Saudi context are only a few years old, the findings of the present study paint an optimistic picture of the success of the translation courses in the country. With data highlighting the use of semantic translation for dealing with the English phrasal verbs formed with 'come' and 'go' roots, the translational and language abilities of the prospective translators hold promise.

6. Conclusion

The escalating demand for communication experts in the labor market has led universities and academic institutions to standardize undergraduate and graduate translation programs. Consequently, multilingual scholars specializing in linguistics or literature are frequently entrusted with teaching translation—an art that transcends mere expression of meaning. A comprehensive study becomes pivotal, offering invaluable insights to translators, readers, practitioners, learners, and educators despite the inherent challenges in translating Arabic into English. The current study, however, was highly focused as it aimed to unravel the translational force of dynamic words like 'come' and 'go' which is a challenge for foreign language learners of English, and thus, can pave the way for more nuanced and effective translation techniques to be taught. Investigation of this under-explored aspect of Translation Studies, the findings of this research can enhance cross-lingual understanding and communication, enabling translators to identify any potential gaps overlooked during the translation process and discern the intended meaning of the writer. This study concludes that the Saudi students of translation do not depend heavily on online translation tools which may in any case be usable only in certain skills such as writing, but will definitely not aid them if they were to take up vocations where they need to be adept at translating the spoken word. Another important finding of this study is that translation studies students find the soft tools like English language movies to be more effective in learning language nuances such as phrasal verbs than conventional methods and approaches. Moreover, translation studies students occasionally use online and CAT tools but largely preferred to

use the dictionary. Amongst the popular online tools, translation of English phrasal verbs was found to be most accurate in MateCat and there too, accuracy in back translation was found to be more accurate in the case of the phrasal verbs formed with 'come' at the root than with 'go' verb.

7. Recommendations

The solution to the problem of translating 'come' and 'go' given their unique translational force lies in enlightening students about the nuanced nature of translating English collocations, emphasizing attention to linguistic and cultural aspects. Educators should collaborate with learners to underscore linguistic and cultural parallels and disparities between the languages through collocations and translation exercises. The authors advocate for innovative teaching methods and use of the multimodal approaches to bridge these gaps, urging educators and learners to jointly explore these linguistic and cultural intricacies when learning English collocations.

8. Limitations

The data comprised isolated utterances and this could have caused poor or no response in some cases. Moreover, the study scope did not endeavor to unearth the reasons for the strategy choice in translation from English to Arabic. This data would have added a new dimension to the findings. Lastly, the study was based only on one-way translation of phrasal verbs from English to Arabic. It is hoped that future replications will also undertake reverse translation and add to the findings.

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Authors contributions

Dr. Abdullah Saleh Aziz Mohammed was responsible for development of research methodology, data collection, and revision of the research draft. Prof. Arif Ahmed Mohammed Hassan Al-Ahdal provided the literature review, analysis of data and the first draft of the paper. Both authors made the rectifications proposed by review committee. Overall, all research steps were carried out in close cooperation between both authors.

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Competing interests

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The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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