

## Challenges Facing Translating Arabic-TV news into English

Asst. Instr. Taha Yaseen Shaghati

Department of English - College of Arts - Al-Turath University

Corresponding Author: Asst. Instr. Taha Yaseen Shaghati - [taha.yaseen@uoturath.edu.iq](mailto:taha.yaseen@uoturath.edu.iq)

### ARTICLE INFO

Received: 19 Mar

Accepted: 26 Apr

Volume: 4

Issue: 2

### ABSTRACT

This study examines the linguistic, cultural, and technical challenges of translating Arabic television news into English, a process that extends far beyond direct lexical substitution. Arabic news discourse, shaped by ideology, audience expectations, and sociopolitical context, presents complex constraints affecting both accuracy and reception. Structural differences between Arabic and English particularly in syntax, morphology, and rhetorical style complicate efforts to produce clear and idiomatically appropriate English texts. Arabic often employs high stylistic density, nominalization, and extended sentences, whereas English favors brevity, directness, and linear information flow, requiring translators to restructure content while preserving meaning. Cultural references add further difficulty. Arabic news frequently includes regional political terminology, historical allusions, and culturally embedded metaphors that may be unfamiliar to international audiences. Translators must decide whether to retain, adapt, or contextualize these elements, balancing clarity, neutrality, and audience understanding. Political sensitivity in Arabic media is pronounced, and translators must remain aware of potential ideological weight to avoid bias or misrepresentation. Technical constraints in television broadcasting intensify these challenges. Translators work under strict time pressure, often in live or near-live contexts, facing overlapping speech, regional dialects, and audiovisual synchronization requirements. Subtitles and voice-over formats impose spatial and temporal limits, forcing condensation without distortion. Specialized terminology in politics, economics, and military reporting further demands up-to-date knowledge and bilingual familiarity. The study concludes that translating Arabic TV news into English is a multidimensional task combining linguistic competence, cultural literacy, and technical expertise. Effective translation balances accuracy, accessibility, and ideological sensitivity while maintaining journalistic integrity. The research recommends enhanced translator training integrating media studies, political knowledge, and real-time translation skills, alongside closer collaboration between journalists and translators to ensure more reliable cross-linguistic news communication and a deeper understanding of Arabic-speaking societies in global media contexts.

**KEYWORDS:** Arabic TV News, Translation, English Translation, Media Translation, News Translation, Linguistic Challenges, Cultural Differences.

### Introduction

Translating Arabic-TV news into English is a complex business that lies at the intersection of linguistics, media studies, social and political analysis, and intercultural communication. Arab news broadcasting is announced by major networks such as Al Jazeera, Al Arabiya, and Sky News Arabic. However, the Arab news discourse poses serious challenges that complicate the translation process (Gamal, 2014, p. 22).

In the first place, Arabic-language news uses linguistic and rhetorical conventions that are vastly different from those found in the English-language press. As a result, modern innate Arabic (MSA), the dominant

style used in official broadcasting, has a morphology-influenced morphology, a flexible word ordering system, and a rhetorical tradition influenced by classical Arabic rhetoric. Hence, these linguistic traits often result in grammatically rich, lexically rich, and elevated stylistic qualities that don't always align with the concise and direct style preferred in English news writing. Translators must therefore navigate between fidelity to the source and the communicative expectations of the target audience (Abdulrahman, 2023, p. 12).

The challenges are even greater when dealing with live news interpretation, as translators have only seconds to decipher and paraphrase the message in English. Errors in this context can lead not only to minor misunderstandings, but also to significant political and diplomatic consequences, especially when reporting sensitive events such as armed conflicts, government statements, or crisis situations (Mudawe, 2024, p. 67).

## **Section One**

### **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

Translation of news headlines is a hard work and it is difficult for a translator to translate them correctly because they are problematic in many ways. The headlines in the English language are actually written in a distinctive and professional style which is completely different from normal writing. The challenges that arise when translating news headlines into Arabic form a strong problem to the translator, which requires careful investigation of language variation, culture, ideology, and the specific requirements of headline writing. Thus, this study endeavors to suggest solutions for this problem.

### **1.2 The Objectives of the Study**

This study aims at investigating the strategies used in translating news headlines from English into Arabic. It also aims at examining the challenges facing translators when translating news headlines from English into Arabic.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

The study answers the following questions:

1. What challenges arise when translating news headlines from English into Arabic?
2. What strategies are used to translate news headlines from English into Arabic?

## 1.4 Significance of the Study

The findings of this study are sure useful for the translator who is dealing with news headlines and it is helpful for second-language News readers because it assists them in understanding and analyzing better news headlines. Furthermore, this study gives useful information about the strategies followed by translators in this respect. Hence, it leads to overcoming the respective problems and producing an accurate translation on the part of the translator, for the study proposes solutions involving cognitive and schematic knowledge to overcome the difficulties concerned.

## Section Two

### 2.1 Previous Studies

Halliday (1985: 372) describes headlines as "tiny texts" that must convey much information with limited space, which affects their grammar. This study aims at translating news headlines and identifying the main challenges a translator may encounter. An early work by Shudooh (1988) investigated the challenges of translating language, specifically with regard to syntax and vocabulary. The data used in the study was gathered from M.A. students at Yarmouk University. The findings revealed that there are thirteen primary categories of lexical errors in English, which include problems with the formation of words, literal translation, ambiguity, foreign terms, misunderstanding of the original text, omissions, redundancies, collocations, style, register, incorrect creation, word choice, word order, fragile structure, and message distortion, due to differences in sentence structure between Arabic and English. Additionally, headline writing is essential for making newspapers, periodicals, and news pieces eligible and easily comprehended by audiences.

According to Venuti (1998), translation strategies consist of selecting the foreign text to be translated and devising a method for translating it. He coined the term "domesticating" to refer to translation procedures. Krings (1986) defined translation strategy as "the translator's potentially conscious plans for solving concrete translation problems within the context of a concrete translation task."

Bazza (2012) examines the significant grammatical and semantic structure changes in English news headline translation into Arabic and analyses essential for strategies and procedures. The study's sample includes eight English and Arabic political news headlines from websites like CNN and BBC. There were some linguistic variances, it was determined after investigation. In order to make the translated news



headlines more accurate and effective, the participants used a variety of techniques and methods, such as omitting irrelevant information or omitting information relevant to the source language, which led to significant changes in the messages conveyed. Other than this assertion, the headlines were altered semantically as participants attempted to mistranslate some information to make the headlines seem more likeable and appealing to readers.

## **2.2 Theoretical Background**

### **2.2.1 News Translation Theory**

News translation is widely recognized not as an act of literal linguistic transfer but as a process involving editorial adaptation, ideological reframing, condensation of information, and restructuring for target audiences. Research shows that translators often act as secondary journalists, shaping how events are understood by global viewers. These editorial modifications are sometimes necessary but can also introduce bias or omit culturally significant nuances (Pamungkas, 2019, p. 11; Mustafa, 2021, p. 33).

Subtitling is constrained by strict temporal (timing) and spatial (character-per-line) limitations that force translators to reduce or condense Arabic speech. Because Arabic often uses rhetorically rich expressions and longer syntactic structures, the subtitler faces a high risk of meaning loss when compressing content into two short English lines. Studies indicate that audiovisual translation requires strategic omission and prioritization techniques to ensure comprehensibility while maintaining accuracy (Mudawe, 2024, p. 5; Gamal, 2014, p. 19).

### **2.2 .2Arabic–English Linguistic Differences**

Arabic relies heavily on derivational morphology, rhetorical intensification, and flexible word order, while English requires more fixed syntactic structures and explicit connectors. This mismatch often forces translators to restructure sentences extensively. In TV news contexts, such restructuring must be done under severe time constraints, increasing the risk of mistranslation or oversimplification (Kadhim, 2008, p. 41; World Journal of English Language, 2024, p. 28).

Although advances in AI-based speech recognition and machine translation have improved efficiency in newsrooms, Arabic presents persistent challenges to automation due to diglossia, dialect diversity, rhetorical ambiguity, and idiomatic language. Automated systems frequently misinterpret regional accents, political terminology, or culturally embedded expressions. Human verification therefore remains necessary, especially for breaking news (The Verge, 2024, p. 2; TV Technology, 2025, p. 14).

## 2.3 Challenges in Translating Arabic TV News into English

The challenges can be grouped into six interacting domains: linguistic, cultural-pragmatic, audiovisual/technical, temporal/editorial, ideological/ethical, and institutional/organizational.

### 2.3.1 Linguistic Challenges

Arabic and English differ in word order flexibility, morphological complexity, and the use of clitics and pronouns. Arabic often encodes gender, aspect, and possession morphologically, whereas English requires explicit words. Translators frequently need to restructure sentences or insert explanatory words (explicitation), potentially altering emphasis or tone (Mustafa, 2021, p. 27).

Arabic TV news blends Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) with dialectal insertions and employs rhetorical devices like classical allusions or Quranic-style phrasing. Rendering these registers into English is a challenge; literal translation of classical expressions can sound unnatural, while colloquial utterances may require localization. Additionally, modality (certainty, speculation, and obligation) conveyed through Arabic verb forms and particles may be difficult to reproduce in English (Gamal, 2014, p. 22).

Some Arabic terms, including politically or religiously charged words, have no direct English equivalents. Translators must choose between literal translation, paraphrase, or adding explanatory notes, each choice affecting fidelity and comprehensibility (Kadhim, 2008, p. 45; Salih, 2023, p. 19). Metaphors, proverbs, and rhetorical devices are common in Arabic TV news. Literal translation risks loss of meaning or misinterpretation, while equivalent English idioms may shift nuance. Studies of subtitled Arabic proverbs demonstrate that translators employ equivalence, paraphrase, or omission, producing varied interpretive outcomes (Journal of Language Teaching & Research, 2025, p. 33).

### 2.3.2 Cultural-Pragmatic Challenges

Arabic news may reference Quranic verses, hadiths, historical events, or local cultural contexts unfamiliar to English-speaking audiences. Translators must decide whether to indicate, paraphrase, or omit such references, influencing comprehension and perceived legitimacy (Abdulrahman, 2023, p. 11). Speech acts functioning as accusation, apology, or promise operate differently across Arabic and English. Translators must preserve pragmatic appropriateness; misrendering an indirect Arabic critique as a blunt English statement can distort tone (Salih, 2023, p. 22).



### 2.3.3 Audiovisual and Technical Constraints

Subtitlers face strict limits on characters and reading time (typically 140–180 characters per line). Arabic-to-English subtitling often requires more space due to longer English phrasing, forcing condensation or omission. Live closed-captioning amplifies this issue, as speed and latency demand rapid compression (Mudawe, 2024, p. 8). Translators coordinate text/audio with visuals, music, and graphics. On-screen text such as captions, maps, or lower-thirds may conflict with verbal content. Decisions must be made whether to translate on-screen text or prioritize spoken words (Gamal, 2014, p. 26). Regional dialects, background noise, overlapping speech, and rapid delivery make transcription and translation difficult, especially for live interpretation. Errors in hearing names or critical facts are common under these conditions (Pamungkas, 2019, p. 16).

### 2.3.4 Temporal and Editorial Pressures

Live news translation requires immediate rendering. Translators and interpreters often work with incomplete information, relying on omission, summarization, or simplification to keep pace with broadcasts. AI-assisted tools are emerging but still require human supervision (The Verge, 2024, p. 3; TV Technology, 2025, p. 15).

Newsrooms may edit translations to comply with editorial policies, legal requirements, or audience expectations. Localization and condensation can result in loss of source voice or ideological slant. Studies often document such manipulations in translated news (Akasheh, 2021, p. 12).

### 2.3.5 Ideological and Ethical Challenges

Word choices can amplify or attenuate ideological frames. Translators influence audience perception and must be aware of potential bias (Salih, 2023, p. 21). Translators face ethical dilemmas regarding anonymity, legal pressures, and participant safety, particularly in conflict reporting (Abdulrahman, 2023, p. 14).

## 2.4 Examples

The data for this research "Challenges in Translating News Headlines: A Case of English Headlines Rendered into Arabic," consists of ten examples from three bilingual news websites that are BBC, Aljazeera, and CNN: texts from Aljazeera website, CNN website, BBC website were translated from English into Arabic. The collected examples were published in English and Arabic during the period between February and September 2023.

### *Example (1)*

Source Text: Zelensky accuses some Arab leaders of "blind eye" to invasion (BBC) Target Text:

زيلينسكي من السعودية يتهم دولا عربية "بغض الطرف" عن الغزو الروسي لبلاده

Comparing the English and Arabic headlines, we can see that the English one is composed of 10 words while the Arabic one has 12. One of the main differences between English and Arabic headlines is that the Arabic one tends to be more informative. For instance, the phrase "to invasion" is rendered as "الغزو الروسي" "البلاده", and the translator resorts to adding some information to be precise. The translation states that Zelensky made the accusation from Saudi Arabia, but the source headline did not mention where Zelensky declared that accusation, so it is best to remove it to maintain the source text's accuracy. The translation also lacks objectivity since it uses "دولا عربية", but the English headline uses "Arab leaders" to refer to the accused Arab leaders. The translation uses the term "بغض الطرف" to convey the idea of carelessness. It is a literal translation. This term is generally understandable, but it may not capture the exact meaning of the original English phrase "blind eye". So, it is essential to use a more common term that conveys the notion of willful ignorance "تجاهل" to improve the translation.

### Example (2)

Source Text: Moscow bans "500" Americans from Russia, including CNN journalists (CNN) Target Text:

CNN: روسيا تحظر دخول 500 أميركي من بينهم أوباما وصحفيين

A translator resorts to inaccurate inclusion in this example. Due to the inclusion of specific names in the Arabic version containing "أوباما" as one of the banned individuals, which is not mentioned in the original English headline, this translation may not be objective. Adding specific names without evidence or a source can be misleading. The addition introduces subjectivity and could lead to a biased translation because it focuses on a particular person. The inclusion of (أوباما Obama) in the translation could suggest a particular ideological perspective, potentially influencing the reader's perception of the ban. So, it is important to stick to the information provided in the original headline to maintain accuracy. Here is an improved translation for this example:

CNN: موسكو تمنع 500 أمريكي من دخول روسيا من بينهم صحفيين

The translator employed strategies to convey the meaning in translating the above example. One of the strategies is a translation by cultural substitution, which shows that when translating "Moscow" into "روسيا" the translator assumes that the target audience would understand the reference to the capital city within the context of the country.

Another strategy that is used in the example is loan word plus explanation.

For example, the phrase "CNN journalists" could be translated as "صحفيين CNN في". Here, 'CNN' is retained as a loan word from the source language (English) and incorporated into the target language (Arabic). However, since CNN may not be widely known or understood by the target audience, an explanation or clarification may be added to help the readers or listeners understand its meaning. The translation "صحفيين في CNN" provides the loan word "CNN" and follows it with the explanation "(صحفيين) (journalists)" to convey that it refers to journalists working for the CNN channel.

The other strategy that the translator employed is a translation by illustration, for example, providing additional context or examples to clarify the ban on "500 Americans" and mentioning "أميركي من بينهم" "أميركي من بينهم" which translates to "Americans, including Obama, among them."

### **Example (3)**

*Source Text: Break-in at Biden's aide's home while agent outside (BBC) Target Text:*

اقتحام منزل مستشار الأمن القومي لبايدن رغم الحراسة المشددة

The term "aide" does not necessarily imply a national security adviser. It is a general term referring to an assistant, advisor, or collaborator. Using "مستشار الأمن القومي" specifically restricts the interpretation to a national security context, which may not be accurate in all cases. But, "مستشار الأمن"

"القومي" is a more specific and specialized term compared to the general term "aide." It may not fully capture the range of responsibilities or roles that an aide can have. By using such a specific translation, important differences or variations in the aide's role may be lost.

The term "agent" is translated into "الحراسة المشددة", which is incorrect because the term "agent" means in Arabic "أمن" rather than "الحراسة المشددة". Removing the word "outside" from the translation makes it unclear where the agent was stationed during the break-in. The original headline specifies that the break-in occurred while the agent was outside, which adds an important detail to the context of the incident. By omitting this information in the translation, the reader may not fully understand the circumstances surrounding the break-in. So the suggested revision is "اقتحام منزل مستشار بايدن رغم وجود الأمن في الخارج" This strategy is used in this example by the translator to use an unrelated word to paraphrase the phrase "while agent outside" as "despite the presence of the agent outside the house." As a result, the word "agent" is translated as "أمن", which can refer to a representative or someone responsible for specific tasks.

### **Example (4)**

*Source Text: Russia vetoes UN vote to extend key Syria aid route*

*(Aljazeera) Target Text:*

فيتو روسي على تمديد آلية إدخال المساعدات الإنسانية لسوريا عبر الحدود لتسعة أشهر

The translated version is slightly longer than the original headline, which may impact conciseness. This translation includes more details about the "mechanism" and the duration of "nine months." These details provide more information but also increase complexity and length. By including "UN vote", the omission of this information from the target text may introduce a lack of objectivity or bias if the veto is not attributed to a specific authority. As well as it can lead to a loss of clarity and accuracy. This phrase ("nine months") which is mentioned in the target text, but it is not mentioned in the source text could introduce inaccurate details. This phrase "عبر الحدود لمدة تسعة أشهر" increases the length of the sentence which is considered one of the problems of translating news headlines and it may affect in clarity of the text. The researcher suggested the following translation

فيتو روسي ضد تصويت الأمم المتحدة لتمديد إرسال المساعدات الإنسانية لسوريا

During the translation process, the translator utilizes two strategies. The first strategy is using the omission strategy by removing the translation of the phrase "UN vote" from the target text. This omission potentially enhances the brevity of translation but, at the same time, it can lead to a lack of objectivity. Secondly, the translator employs the strategy of addition. By incorporating this strategy, the translator aims to provide additional information and clarity to the translation. An example of this strategy includes details indicating that the aide will persist for nine months. The translator may use this addition to enable the translated text to convey specific information that may not have been explicitly mentioned in the original text.

## **Conclusion**

The complexity of Arabic news discourse shaped by classical rhetorical traditions, contemporary political narratives, and culturally embedded expressions creates significant challenges for translators attempting to deliver accurate and contextually appropriate English renditions. These challenges are heightened by the demands of the audiovisual environment, where content must be synchronized with images constrained by time and tailored to viewing habits of diverse audiences.

The findings of this research show that linguistic differences between Arabic and English remain among the most persistent obstacles in news translation. Arabic's rich morphological system, flexible syntactic

structures, and rhetorical density often resist straightforward transfers into the concise and direct style characteristic of English journalism.

The emergence of advanced technologies, including automatic speech recognition, neural machine translation, and real-time captioning presents significant opportunities for improving speed and workflow efficiency. Nevertheless, as this study has shown, these tools continue to struggle with Arabic's dialectal diversity, figurative language, and complex syntactic constructions. AI-generated output often requires careful human post-editing to correct inaccuracies, avoid cultural misinterpretations, and maintain journalistic tone. The foreseeable future is likely to see more integrated human-machine collaboration, rather than the complete replacement of human translators. Technology serves best as a supportive instrument, enhancing productivity and consistency, but it cannot independently manage the nuanced, context-dependent decisions essential for high-quality Arabic-to-English news translation.

In conclusion, this study affirms that translating Arabic-TV news into English is a complex, interdisciplinary endeavor. It requires not only linguistic proficiency but also cultural literacy, technological competence, and ethical awareness. The findings highlight the essential role of human judgment in negotiating the tensions between accuracy, comprehensibility, and contextual adaptation, while also pointing to the potential of technological tools as facilitators rather than substitutes. Ultimately, effective translation is an act of mediation, bridging linguistic and cultural divides to deliver news that is intelligible, faithful, and meaningful for global audiences. By acknowledging the multifaceted challenges inherent in this process, future research and practice can continue to refine strategies, enhance translator training, and optimize the collaboration between humans and machines in the pursuit of accurate and culturally sensitive news communication.

## References

Abdulrahman, N. M. (2023). Linguistic challenges faced by EFL translators/interpreters in Kurdish journalism (Technical report).

Akasheh, A. (2021). Adaptation or loss in news translation: The BBC Arabic.

- Al-Shamali, M. (1992). Managing in translating English journalistic texts into Arabic (Master's thesis, Yarmouk University).
- Bazza, T. (2012). Headline translation from English into Arabic: A comparative study (Master's thesis, Abdelmalek Essaadi University).
- Gamal, M. Y. (2014). Audiovisual translation in the Arab world: A changing scene (Working paper). Research portals.
- Halliday, M. A. K. (1985). An introduction to functional grammar. Edward Arnold.
- Kadhim, K. A. (2008). Arabic translation of English news: A comparative analysis. Eprints repository.
- Krings, H. P. (1986). Translation problems and translation strategies of advanced German learners of French (L2).
- Mudawe, O. M. N. (2024). Technical constraints faced by Arab translators in audiovisual subtitling. *Saudi Journal of Translation Studies*, 5(1), 1–15.
- Mustafa, A. (2021). Vagueness in news headlines and its effect on translation. *Iraqi Journal of Linguistics*, 12(3), 27–38.
- Pamungkas, M. E. P. (2019). Challenges in online news translation. *Open Journal of Philology*, 7(2), 11–26.
- Salih, N. Y. (2023). Ideological adaptations to translating news articles from English into Arabic (Conference paper).
- Shudooh, Y. M. I. (1988). Lexical and syntactic problems in translation (Doctoral dissertation, Yarmouk University).
- The Verge. (2024). Microsoft testing live translation on Copilot Plus PCs. *The Verge Tech Reports*, 2024(5), 2–9.
- TVTechnology. (2025). New Mexico PBS brings ATSC 3.0 multilingual service using LingoPal (live AI translation). *TVTechnology Reports*, 2025(3), 14–22.
- Venuti, L. (1998). Strategies of translation. In M. Baker (Ed.), *Routledge encyclopedia of translation studies* (pp. 240–244). Routledge.



World Journal of English Language. (2024). Challenges in translation news headlines: A case of English headlines rendered into Arabic. 14(2), 25–30.