

Challenges in Arabic–English Journalistic Translation: A Critical Literature Review of Linguistic and Ideological Issues

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ABSTRACT

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Translating news between Arabic and English is more complex than it may initially appear. The process is far more than the process of finding the same words, as it usually touches upon the structural differences, cultural allusions, and in most situations, the ideological pressure. This critical literature review is based on a narrative synthesis of 18 peer-reviewed studies published from 2023 to 2026 and explores the interaction of these factors in real journalistic practice. An even closer examination of the literature indicates that there are three common points of challenge. Firstly, structural and lexical differences between Arabic and English can be observed that have to be constantly adjusted to. Second, cultural and religious allusions are not always easily transferred, and this may interfere with reception of messages by various audiences. Third, and maybe more crucially, translation is not a vacuum, but is often influenced by institutional agendas, political postures, and broader discourses within which news is made. What emerges in these studies is that news translation is hardly an activity that is neutral. Rather, it appears to be a kind of negotiation, with linguistic decisions being affected by the cultural expectations and the institutional interests. Simultaneously, the current literature is also rather restricted in scope. There is a need to pay more attention especially regarding the digital media space and the stresses that are posed by the acceleration of news production cycles.

KEYWORDS: Arabic–English translation, news translation, ideology, journalistic discourse, cultural adaptation, political agendas

1. Introduction

The Arabic and English in international journalism have never had a perfect balance in their relationship. In most instances, it indicates more political, historical and cultural conflicts between regions where these languages are spoken. According to Elewa (2025), translation in these circumstances is usually associated with implications which extend beyond the language. News translation between languages can re-frame events and create a new perception of events.

As a matter of fact, the translation is not brought by grammatical or lexical differences only. These are the editorial policies, the expectations of the audience, and the institutional point of view. Al Rashid (2025) notes that news companies tend to come up with in-house policies that directly influence translation choices, particularly in situations where sensitive political or religious stories are involved. This implies that translation is hardly neutral even in cases where it seems to be technically correct.

The recent research has cast a growing doubt on the notion that linguistic and ideological components of translation can be addressed independently. An example of this is by Abualadas (2024) who believes that seemingly minor linguistic decisions can add to the general patterns of representation. Likewise, Mohammed and Gad (2025) demonstrate that the stylistic choices, including the treatment of hyperbole, can change the desired effect of journalistic texts in language transfers.

The three recurrent areas of difficulty are used to review such work and are discussed in this review. The former are structural and lexical variations between Arabic and English, which regularly must be adjusted to. The second relates to cultural and religious allusions, which cannot always be easily translated to the

audience. Gomaa (2024) emphasizes that these cultural aspects may cause the meaning gaps unless managed. The third is the issue of ideological impact, either overt or covert, in influencing content of translated news.

Instead of merely summarizing past studies, this review tries to connect these strands and find out the similar patterns. Simultaneously, it indicates issues that have not been thoroughly studied, especially when it comes to the fast-changing digital media spaces and the pressures that they present to translation practices.

In this regard, the present review is going to critically synthesize recent studies on Arabic-English journalistic translation by investigating three intersecting domains of challenge, including structural and lexical disparities, cultural and religious allusions, and ideological pressures impacted by institutional interests. This study employs a critical literature review approach to systematically examine and evaluate recent research in the field.

2. Review Methodology

The systematic method of identifying and filtering the appropriate studies is adopted in this review, and the narrative synthesis is appropriate due to the exploratory nature of the topic. This study follows a structured literature review methodology with clearly defined inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure transparency and rigor.

Search Strategy: The search of major academic databases, such as Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, and the Translation Studies Bibliography and the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) were considered as the relevant sources to identify relevant studies. The search was limited to the period of January 2023 to March 2026 to ensure that the current state of affairs within the field was covered.

The search was guided by a set of keyword combinations, which comprised Arabic-English translation, journalism, media, and ideology in addition to other similar concepts such as bias, culture, and linguistic challenges.

Inclusion Criteria: The studies had to meet the following inclusion criteria: (a) publication in peer-reviewed journals or academic books, with selected institutional and repository sources of direct relevance being considered on an exceptional basis; (b) the subject matter of the studies had to be linguistic, cultural, or ideological aspects of the process of translation; (c) the studies had to be published within the last 2 years (2023-2026). Conceptual background Foundational literature published before 2023 was reviewed to provide theoretical context but was not the main focus of the review.

Exclusion Criteria: The studies were eliminated when they: (a) concentrated on translation in non-journalistic areas (e.g., literary, legal, medical); (b) dealt with audiovisual translation and no journalistic text; (c) were opinion articles, editorials or dissertations which are not empirically grounded or lack a clear methodology.

There are some non-traditional sources which were selectively included, e.g., institutional repositories and datasets, because they help to give context. Although not necessarily peer-reviewed in the traditional meaning, these sources provide applicable empirical findings that can be used to supplement the reviewed literature.

Screening Process: The first search gave a result of about 180 potentially relevant records. Following the elimination of duplicates, 142 records were screened in terms of their titles and abstracts. Among these, 48 full-text articles were evaluated according to their eligibility, 18 of which were found to fit all inclusion criteria and were included in the ultimate synthesis. The review centers on the most directly related ones, though admitting that the literature on this subject, though expanding, is rather limited in its scope.

Type of Review: This article takes the form of a critical narrative literature review. Instead of conducting a meta-analysis, it aims at synthesizing results by themes, finding patterns in the results of the studies, and critically assessing the level of knowledge in the field. The review is critical in the sense that it does not

merely summarize the studies but evaluates their contributions, limitations and implication to both theory and practice.

3. Linguistic and Structural Challenges

The linguistic difference between Arabic and English provides underlying challenges to the journalists and translators which remain even in the situations when ideological pressures are minimal. The recent theoretical literature has recorded a number of recurrent types of linguistic difficulty that inform the practice of news translation between these languages.

Syntactic and Grammatical Asymmetries.

At the most fundamental level, the differences in the Arabic and English grammar structure require the constant changes in the translation process that may lead to some considerable implications to the journalistic texts. Using the theory of translation shifts developed by Catford to the translation of United Nations news texts, Hsouné and Chibani (2025) discovered that structure shifts and tense shifts are the most common changes that need to be imposed when translating to the alternate language. Their interpretation of audiovisual news pieces showed that though translations often do not conform to the formal organization of the original texts, they do not lose their meaning and functional role by adapting to the context.

Practically, this observation is an expression of widespread problem in journalistic translation. Translators usually do not have enough time, so they can be pressured towards more direct or literal translation. Although such a method may be more rapid, it does not necessarily pass on the desired message to the target population (Baker, 2018).

This can be attributed to the structural variation between the Arabic and English. Meaning is structured in both languages differently either in the form of a sentence or flow of information. This is why a proper translation can hardly be accomplished without some form of adaptation, not to mention that in the context of journalism, meaning where clarity and readability are paramount, it can hardly be achieved.

3.2 Lexical and Terminological Problems.

Lexical issues are a major issue in journalistic translation, especially where there is a special terminology in various disciplines. News items usually contain words that are based on politics, economics, science, and technology many of which are not easily translated across the languages.

Gomaa (2024) emphasizes that the process of translation of the media texts between the Arabic and English languages also entails a linguistic and cultural aspect, especially when it comes to the technical or field-specific terms. In these instances, the accuracy can only be achieved when the language is known as well as the familiarity of the translator to the subject matter. Bielsa and Bassnett (2009) make the same argument, stating that the translation of news needs not only a level of linguistic competence but also a general understanding of the context within which the text functions. This implies that translators cannot just find similar words, but they have to think of the way the terminology is going to be interpreted by the target audience.

It is even more apparent in the field of political journalism where the use of terminology is usually laden with historical and ideological connotations. Lahlali (2023) demonstrates that the lexical decisions in the Arabic media discourse is hardly neutral, especially in political sensitive situations. His critique of various news sources proves that the choice of words can be used to represent the unspoken opinions and

institutional concerns. Consequently, the words that appear to be synonymous will not have the same meaning in practice. This supports the notion that the translation of political language needs to be handled with a lot of care, as opposed to using a simple lexical replacement.

3.3 Rhetorical and Stylistic Differences.

Varying rhetorical style is a critical cause of challenge in Arabic to English journalistic translation. Both languages have their rules of presenting information, developing the tone, and appealing to the reader. According to Mohammed and Gad (2025), this matter is discussed in their analysis of English journalistic hyperbole translation into Arabic. They analyze that hyperbolic constructions that are often employed in writing news in English to produce emphasis and draw attention, do not necessarily correspond to the more conservative rhetorical practices that are generally followed in Arabic news writing.

The paper utilized a corpus of English news stories and their Arabic translations through the use of Venuti domestication model to determine the treatment of hyperbolic figures. The analysis demonstrates that the literalist approaches always wash out the intended rhetorical effect, whereas culturally attuned amplifications have a stronger appeal to the Arabic audience. The authors suggest the culturally informed translational practice which would not diminish the rhetorical strength of hyperbole and would not break the Arabic rules of journalism.

This study highlights a very important aspect that the linguistic issues in journalistic translation are not only about information transmission and its correctness, but about recreation of rhetoric effects that make journalism persuasive and interesting. When the effects are pegged to conventions of language, their translation demands a creative decision-making that is both faithful to a source text and effective in the target situation

4. Cultural and Religious Dimensions

In case the linguistic issues are daunting, the cultural and religious aspects of Arabic-English news translation will be layers of complications that can radically alter the meaning and perception of news texts.

4.1 Cultural Referents and Conceptual Gaps.

Cultural translation has always been considered the place of challenge in Arabic to English work and this is no different in journalistic texts. Research by Gomaa (2024) on BBC Online News revealed that cultural allusions were one of the major obstacles to translation in translation, and successful communication demanded that a translator was able to overcome the language and cultural differences between the target and source audience.

This difficulty is even more prominent when the news texts mention cultural institutions, social practices, or concepts, which lack clear equivalents in the target language. Under these circumstances, translators are usually left with a decision to make whether to make the reference more familiar to the target audience or leave it the way it is and give a little explanation. Both of these options have the potential to shape the interpretation of the message by the readers, and in certain instances, they might affect their perception of the event being covered.

4.2 Religious Words and Sensitivities.

The use of religious allusions in the journalistic texts poses particular challenges in the Arabic-English context, as the Islamic discourse is the core of the Arabic language and the various religious environments of the English-speaking audience. A research study conducted by investigating cultural bias in translation of Arabic news reports into English has reported the creation of barriers by religious ideologies which are

quite hard to break. Although this data-driven study is not a peer-reviewed article in the conventional meaning of this term, it offers examples of the kind of religious translation problems that translators have to deal with on a regular basis.

Based on examples of Arab news agencies as translated by various translators, the analysis indicates that religious issues are among the most important issues in translation of Arabic journalistic texts into English. These challenges are not just based on the necessity to render religious terminology in a way that makes sense but the larger issue of communicating the cultural and emotional overtones that religious allusions have among Arabic-speaking people.

4.3 Cultural Bias and Manifestation.

Arguably, however, the most important and common issue, which manifests itself in Arabic to English news translation, is in fact the cultural prejudice, which is at times even more noticeable than the political, or religious ones. This bias may be introduced by using ordinary translation techniques including addition, modulation, transposition, and seek-equivalence search. Though such procedures might appear to be neutral, they can be used to influence the way events and views are framed to the intended audience.

Cultural bias has much in common with the political and social context. Translators can be biased, either directly or indirectly, by prevailing views or current geopolitical conflicts. Translations under these circumstances may also be seen as having specific narratives instead of acting as neutralities (Baker, 2006).

This argument is also supported by Lahlali (2023), who examines the Arabic media discourse by revealing that cultural and ideological issues affect news presentation. His work emphasizes the fact that various media organizations are more inclined to use particular discursive practices, which are based on their institutional inclinations and priorities.

4.4 Organizational Reactions to Cultural Sensitivity.

To add to the research on the issue of cultural challenges, the literature on institutional translation practices shows that news organizations are creating systematic strategies of dealing with cultural and religious sensitivities. In the article, Al Rashid (2025) examines the social and institutional aspects of the news translation of the BBC and Al Arabiya, with a particular emphasis on how these companies and organizations address what is termed in the source as the Islamist discourse. The study, based on qualitative interviews with newsroom employees, concludes that both organizations have standard operating procedures and guidelines to follow with translation, especially when handling religious material is concerned.

The study shows that translation teams incorporate language professionals who do not only make the translation process easier to achieve but also control the linguistic options to make the content pass institutional requirements of being impartial but not offending the religious feelings. This observation indicates that cultural and religious issues are not solved by individual translator choices, but institutionalized rules and professional practices.

5. Ideological Manipulation and Institutional Agendas

Although the problem of linguistic and cultural issues is important, the recent studies tend to lay more stress on the ideological aspects of Arabic-English journalistic translation. There is an emerging literature that says that translation practices are influenced by the difference in language, but also by institutional interests, political forces and larger narrative structures.

According to recent research, AIs based on translation systems are still not able to express some culturally sensitive meaning and expressions depending on the context (Al-Azzawi et al., 2025).

This is further demonstrated by the comparative analysis of Al-Jazeera and BBC Arabic by Lahlali (2023), who explains that the differences in the news organizations are not only manifested in the content choice, but also in the linguistic and discursive approaches of the news organizations to the reporting. This implies that the ideological influence is applied at various levels such as the selection of issues as well as the manner in which information is expressed and framed.

5.1 Patronage and Political Agendas.

An example of the impact of institutional patronage on translation practice is the study by Elewa (2025) on manipulation in English news reports translated into Arabic that has a lot of detailed evidence on how it influences the practice of translation. Analyzing the translations in two of the largest Arabic newspapers, Egyptian Al-Ahram and Syrian Tishreen, the research reports on numerous manipulation techniques used to change the views to suit the political interests of the newspaper clients.

This analysis indicates that in the sampled institutional settings, the main aim of translating news articles into Arabic is not necessarily to have linguistic equivalence, but to naturalize messages to facilitate the communication flow or use censorship that can advance the interests of patrons. The strategies adopted in the chosen translations justify repressive actions and policies of Arab patrons, which proves how translation can become an instrument of pursuing institutional, not communicative, goals.

The study adds to a more comprehensive perception of the process of news translation as the operation that is inherent in power relationships. Institutional translators who have defined political engagements are not independent professionals but agents whose outputs are assessed as being institutionally acceptable. What comes out, Elewa opines, is translation that in some of the recorded situations, considers narrative consistency more important than informational consistency.

5.2 Explicitation and the Construction of the Otherness.

Explicitation in news translation may affect the representation of some groups even in the context where the translation of the text seems correct. Most of the times, translators bring in the implicit meanings to the fore, and this can lead to the interpretation of the reader in a certain direction.

According to Baker (2006), translation is closely related to the creation of narratives in which the decisions in wording and focus can define the way things and societies are viewed. This implies that the slight changes in expression may have a wider implication which are not sentence-specific.

This implies that ideological interference in translation is not necessarily based on direct distortion. Rather, it can be manifested in terms of priorities and choices which accumulate to a given portrayal of the source community.

This can be especially important with regards to the media where patterns of emphasis which have been recurrently enforced can be seen to influence the formation of self and other perceptions. Such tendencies can over time reinforce the individual translations that seem to be correct, even though the individual translations may seem correct.

5.3 Temporal Pressure and Ideological Implications of Temporality.

Another aspect of ideological power is the result of studies of material conditions of the news production. Researching the effect of accelerated news cycles on the quality of translation using parallel Arabic-English reportage on Al-Sharq Al-Awsat, Hamed (2025) examines the issue of translation quality and its potential influence on news content. The analysis focuses on news reports on humanitarian aid, war, and foreign affairs, in which there are major trends of the content change within time limitations.

The results indicate that there are systematic differences in information prioritization, emphasis on narration and framing of context between the source and target texts. When translators are under the pressure of the deadline, they demonstrate a lack of cultural sensitivity, a weakening of the narrative

coherence and the accentuation of the sources and targets differently. Such content divergence trends are stronger than the ones recorded in the literature before.

Although Hamed is more concerned with quality, rather than ideology, the results of his study have some evident implications to the consideration of ideological impacts on translation. Translators are bound to revert to default assumptions and institutional demands when time pressure compels them to make fast choices on what to retain, what to exclude and the manner in which they are framed. The pressure of speed may increase instead of diminishing ideological effects on translated texts in situations where such assumptions have ideological implications.

6. Synthesis and Discussion

The scholarship that has been examined in this paper creates a complicated image of Arabic-English journalistic translation as a practice that is influenced by various, interacting forces. A number of themes are identified after the synthesis of these studies. This could be the reason why translation in the journalistic setting is frequently influenced by more general institutional and contextual factors than by the linguistic ones.

To begin with, the difference between linguistic and ideological issues is hard to sustain in practice. The linguistic decisions to make: to translate a hyperbolic phrase literally or to seek a culturally resonant equivalent, to explain a cultural allusion or to make it implicit possess ideological consequences. The works by Mohammed and Gad (2025) on hyperbole and those by Abualadas (2024) on explicitation both show that choices on language are also choices on how the reader will place him/herself to the events and people being described.

Second, the institutional context turns out to be an important factor of translation practice. The newspapers of Elewa (2025), the news networks of Al Rashid (2025), and the research institute of Abualadas (2024) are all characterized by translation that is influenced by the missions of the organization and political commitments. This implies that Arabic-English news translation can only be understood by taking note of the characteristics of the languages as well as the institutional contexts within which translation takes place.

Third, material circumstances of news production, especially the time constraints mentioned by Hamed (2025) interplay with linguistic and ideological influences to which more attention should be paid. Translators can be less able to consider the cultural and ideological consequences of their decisions when they feel pressured by the deadline, which may enhance the patterns of bias that act on the subconscious level.

Fourth, translation has directionality. Research involving English-to-Arabic translation (Elewa, 2025; Mohammed and Gad, 2025) records other patterns than that of Arabic-to-English work (Abualadas, 2024). This imbalance probably indicates the various power relations between the languages and the media systems that they are translated into, the various audiences and institutional conditions in which the translations are created.

Fifth, convergence and divergence are observed in the reviewed studies. It is widely accepted in the literature that ideological influences have a strong impact on translation in Arabic-English journalistic situations. Research however varies in the degree to which they attribute such patterns to explicit manipulation and institutionalized routines and professional norms. The focus on patronage and censorship by Elewa (2025) is contrary to the emphasis on standardized guidelines and professional practices by Al Rashid (2025), which implies that ideological influences can be manifested in different ways and can be different in institutional settings.

7. Conclusion and Future Directions

The literature surveyed in this study has shown that the Arabic-English journalistic translation is not a simple linguistic transfer. In the institutional contexts and the textual corpora under analysis, translators negotiate structural discrepancies across languages, cultural and religious terms that cannot be easily equated and ideological forces that influence not only the choice of news texts but also their translation. The resultant translations are hybrid products that are not just a reflection of the source texts, but also the institutional, political and cultural contexts within which they are translated.

There are several limitations of the present review that should be admitted. Moreover, not all of the studies used in this review are based on rather large datasets or case studies, a feature that can influence the applicability of their results. The dependence on published studies can be a biased representation of translation practices in non-Western or small media organizations. Also, the emphasis on recent publications (2023/ 2026), results in the fact that foundational contributions to the field are discussed only indirectly.

This review leads to several recommendations that future research should take. Digital and social media platforms have influenced journalistic translation, and this effect warrants continued consideration since the media environment has been actively characterized by translation activity across a variety of platforms where affordances could possibly influence translation practice in a new fashion. The comparative research of various kinds of news organizations, state-affiliated news media, commercial broadcasting, independent online media might shed light on the role of institutional difference in translation results because the reviewed studies are mostly based on large newspaper and network companies. A combination of textual analysis and ethnographic research on translators in the workplace may help clarify the decision-making processes that result in the creation of translated texts, which would help to deepen our insights into the social and psychological aspects of journalistic translation. The effect of time pressure and ideological impact on each other should be systematically examined, and the speeding up of the news cycle can have implications on the quality of translation that go beyond the technical aspect that is often discussed. These results also substantiate the opinion that AI tools are to be employed as the helping tools instead of autonomous systems, and human control is still necessary in guaranteeing meaningful and contextually applicable communication (Al-Azzawi and Saeed, 2026).

Much of this research raises the question of translator training implicitly. When it is possible that the translation of journalism needs not merely linguistic competence but also cultural sophistication and awareness of ideological forces, then the training programs must equip the translators to face issues that surpass the traditional curriculum. The creation of a pedagogical approach that can be used to tackle the entire complexity of Arabic English news translation is still an urgent issue in the work of educators and institutions.

To the working translator, the research reviewed highlights the need to be critically reflexive - conscious of how the linguistic decisions one makes can have unwanted ideological consequences. In the case of news institutions, the results indicate that there is need to have clear guidelines to recognize and not reject the political aspects of translation without compromising the commitments to accuracy and fairness. To teachers, the study leads to the idea of curricula that include linguistic training and the critical approach to media structure and ideological mechanism.

In a modern busy media world, where information flows in both ways, between Arabic and English-speaking communities, the work of journalistic translation goes beyond the text itself. It is directly connected with the meaning of information, its contextualization, and interpretation. Although the papers analyzed in this paper provide valuable information on these issues, more research is required, both theoretical and practical, to enhance the quality and reliability of news translation. Such challenges are not going to die in the real-world situation, especially in the face of the ever-increasing speed of production and dissemination of news content by digital media.

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