



**Targamh**  
*Art Of Translation*

English ↔ Arabic ↔ French

# Grammatical Errors and Style in Translation From Arabic into English

This paper has two sections: The first one elucidates a number of grammatical and stylistic points encountered when an Arabic text is translated into English. The second section seeks to point at a number of errors in grammar and style in Arabic.

## Section I:

### Grammatical Errors in Translation from Arabic into English

#### Use of Infinitive (Madar)

It is preferable to start with a suitable indefinite infinitive, مصدر نكرة, when translating sentences which start with an indefinite infinitive. For instance, in the following sentence: 'A just peace will bring prosperity to the region,' it is preferable to say: إن تحقيق (أو إقرار أو إحلال أو إقامة) سلام عادل سيجلب الازدهار إلى المنطقة, rather than saying: إن سلاما عادلا سيجلب الازدهار إلى المنطقة.

## Use of Relative Pronoun

The relative pronoun is used after both definite and indefinite nouns in English, but should be used only after definite nouns in Arabic. Thus, “a solution which is based on justice is a permanent one,” should be translated into Arabic as: إن حلا يقوم على العدل حل دائم.

## Different Prepositions

Some languages, such as English, permit consecutive verbs and nouns to be followed by different prepositions. For example, “he expressed his approval of and support for the resolution.”

This way of expression is not allowed in Arabic. It cannot be said, أعرب عن موافقته على وتأييده للقرار.

In such a case, the noun governed by the prepositions should be given after the first part. The structure should be as follows: أعرب عن موافقته على القرار وتأييده له.

However, there is an alternative way to deal with this matter, namely, the use of two infinitives which are followed by the same preposition. Thus, it could be said, أعرب عن إقراره , موافقة replacing إقرار , وتأييده للقرار

Additionally, it is incorrect in Arabic to have two consecutive verbs, only one of which requires a preposition. Thus, it could not be said نحن نقول وندعو إلى ذلك , “we say and call for that.” The correct sentence should be: نحن نقول ذلك . وندعو إليه

## Use of Present Perfect

The present perfect tense should not always be translated in the past tense in Arabic, especially when making reference to positions, opinions or situations, as the present perfect has a present connotation, which might be lost when translated in the past tense in Arabic. For example, “we have supported struggle against poverty.” It is preferable to translated it as follows: نؤيد الكفاح ضد الفقر , rather than أيدنا الكفاح ضد الفقر , because the last form might be taken to mean a past tense, whereas the speaker points at the continuing present.

## Demonstrative Pronouns (هؤلاء وأولئك)

These demonstrative pronouns should not be used restrictively in Arabic. For example, in the sentence, “I shall give the floor to those representatives who have expressed a wish to reply,” the word “those” refers to a limited group of representatives, namely, those who wish to reply. Whereas in the following sentence, أعطى الكلمة لأولئك الممثلين الذين يرغبون ... , the demonstrative pronoun أولئك is redundant, and does not express the meaning present in English. Thus, it would be accurate to translate the sentence into Arabic without translating “those.”

## Translation of “Such”

The word “such” should not always be translated as مثل. For example, in the sentence, “Let us adopt such measures as will ensure peace,” the correct translation is فلنعتد من التدابير ما يكفل السلام.

## Use of the Comma

It is noted that in a series of nouns in English, the comma is used between the nouns except for the last, where it would be preceded by “and” or “or.” For example, “students, graduates or researchers,” and “reporters, translators and interpreters.”

In Arabic, however, it is incorrect to use the comma instead of the conjunction. What is needed is repetition of the conjunction. Thus, it is not correct to say، المدونون، المترجمون والشفويون. The structure should be as follows: المدونون والمترجمون والشفويون.

### Use of ضد

Translation of “against” as ضد should be avoided if the word على expresses the intended meaning. For example, “to exert pressure against a person,” or “to commit aggression against a neighboring state,” should be translated as ممارسة ارتكاب عدوان على دولة مجاورة or الضغط على شخص

### Use of and من خلال

Excessive use of **من خلال** should be avoided, especially where the instrumental letter **ب** could be used instead. For example, “it is achieving its objective through diplomacy,” and “this can be achieved through positive action.” The preferred translation would be **يمكن** and **إنه يحقق هدفه بالدبلوماسية** .  
**تحقيق ذلك بالعمل الايجابي**.

### Use of **هو**

Where the subject and predicate of nominal sentences are in the definite form, insertion of an appropriate pronoun between the subject and the predicate is needed. For example, the translation of the sentence, “The book is the product of his thought” would be **الكتاب هو نتاج فكره**. When the subject is definite and the predicate is indefinite, there is no need to insert such a pronoun. Thus, the translation of “the article is boring” is **المقال ممل**.

### Specification (التمييز)

In English sentences where specification is used, such as, “he did this in disregard/contempt of that,” the correct

تمييز، فعل ذلك تجاهلا/احتقارا لذلك  
and not فعل ذلك في تجاهل/في احتقار لذلك.

## Translation of “With”

Translation of “with” always into مع would be erroneous.  
There are cases where “with” should be translated as ب. For  
example, the sentence “with common efforts, we shall  
achieve our objective,” should be translated as follows:  
ببذلالجهود المشتركة سنحقق هدفنا  
“With” is used in other meanings,  
including بفضل، نظرا إلى، بالاقتران ب، إذ، بالاشتراك مع، بمواكبة، لكون

## The Translation of “Only”

In many cases, it is preferable not to translate “only” as  
فقط. Rather, the structure ليست ... إلا should be used. For  
example, it is preferable to have “Maintained for local  
consumption only” translated as ليست مصانة إلا للاستهلاك المحلي  
and not مصانة للاستهلاك المحلي فقط.

## Translation of “Free”

Needless to say that it is erroneous to translated the word “free” always as حرّ. “Free” also has the meaning of خال. For example, the translation of the phrase “a zone free of weapons” should be منطقة خالية من الأسلحة. The phrase “free of charge” is translated as بالمجان.

## Section II: Arabic Style

### Combination of a Verb in the Present Tense with a Verb in the Past Tense

A verb in the present tense cannot be combined with a verb in the past tense without repeating mention of the active subject of a verbal clause. For example, it is erroneous to say, نصّ البيان على ذلك ويدعو إلى ذلك. The correct writing is نصّ البيان على ذلك وهو يدعو إلى ذلك. Also, it is wrong to write إن بريتوريا استمرت في عنادها وتواصل سياستها. The correct sentence would be إن بريتوريا استمرت في عنادها وهي تواصل سياستها.

Other forms of asymmetry in parallel constructions should be avoided. For example, the following structure should be avoided: نأمل في اتخاذ قرار من شأنه تحقيق الاستقرار وينص ,على إدانة المعتدي be a parallel with a clause, which is من شأنه. Rather, two verbs mentioned in parallel are needed: نأمل في اتخاذ قرار يكون من شأنه تحقيق الاستقرار وينص على إدانة المعتدي.

Moreover, it is erroneous to say إن بلدي يدعو اتخاذ قرار وأن إلى اتخاذ قرار ودراسة. Instead, it should be said either إلى اتخاذ قرار ودراسة, namely, using two infinitives, or إلى أن نتخذ قرارات وأن , namely, using two verbs.

### Use of كلما

It is preferable not to repeat mention of the word كلما in the translation of sentences as the following: The longer we wait, the greater the danger, كلما طال انتظارنا كلما زاد الخطر. The translation should be as follows: كلما طال انتظارنا زاد الخطر.

### Erroneous Use of the و

Use of the و before the relative pronoun in cases as the following is erroneous: كتبت الكتاب المفيد والذي كلمتني عنه في الأسبوع الماضي. This sentence means, "I wrote the useful book and that about which you spoke to me a week ago." This means that two things were written, namely, the useful book and that about which a person spoke to me. However, this is not meant by the above-mentioned sentence. The change in meaning was caused by the insertion of و before الذي. The correct structure, then, should be كتبت الكتاب المفيد الذي ... unless the speaker intended to refer to two books.

### Use of إلا أنّ

It would be incorrect to use إلا أنّ as a tool of rectification after use of رغم أنّ. For example, إن هذه القصة رغم أنها شيقة إلا أنّها لا تخلو من عيوب. Rather, it should be said إن هذه القصة رغم أنها شيقة إلا أنّها لا تخلو من عيوب. To repeat rectification by using إلا أنّ would be a double rectification, which is negation of negation, which is, in effect, confirmation.

## Use of بالنسبة and the Transitive Verb

It would be erroneous to use بالنسبة in sentences such as هذا الموقف مُرَضٌ بالنسبة إلى حكومتي. The phrase of بالنسبة is not needed. What should be said would be هذا الموقف مُرَضٌ لحكومتي, the last phrase, being the object of the active participle مُرَضٌ.

## The Definite Article with غَيْرَ

The word غَيْرَ cannot come with the definite article ال. Rather, the definite article should precede the word following غير. For example, هذا البيان غير الصحيح, and not هذا البيان الغير صحيح.

## The Case of the Noun after the Phrase of بما في ذلك

The phrase following the phrase of **بمَنْ في ذلك** or **بما في ذلك** should be in the nominative case. Thus, it should be said **قدم رفرفت الطيور بما في ذلك الحمام**, and **الرجال بمن في ذلك المعلمون**.

### Use of **لكي**

Sometimes, use of **لكي** or **كي** is erroneous. For example, it is wrong to say **لقد حان الوقت لكي نفعل ذلك**. The correct structure is **لقد حان الوقت لأن نفعل ذلك**.

### Use of **لا يزال** and **لا يزال**

In the present tense, it could be said **ما يزال** and **لا يزال**, which means “he is still” or “it is still.” In the past tense, it could be said **ما زال**, which means “he has not ceased” or “it has not ceased.” It is erroneous to say **لا زال** in the sense of **لا زال** as **ما زال** has the meaning of expressing a wish: **لا زال**: **مجدك**: may your glory remain.

## Expression of Mutuality

Many times, mistake is made in the use of the word **يعض** and in the Arabic translation of “each other.” Where “each other” comes as part of a sentence, **بعض** should be used twice, the first time as a first part of the *idaafa* construct (the *mudaaf*), and the second time in the indefinite, preceded by the appropriate preposition. This preposition is the one which follows from the verb in the sentence. A few examples are provided in the following.

رئيس الحكومة يدعو الوزراء إلى أن **يعض** رئيس الحكومة يدعو الوزراء إلى أن يتعاون بعضهم مع بعض OR يتعاونوا بعضهم

“The prime minister calls upon the ministers to cooperate with each other,” not رئيس الحكومة يدعو الوزراء إلى أن **يعض**

رئيس الحكومة يدعو الوزراء إلى أن **يعض** رئيس الحكومة يدعو الوزراء إلى أن أكلت الأسماك بعضها بعضا ;يتعاون بعضهم بعضا

“The fish ate each other,” not نسي الناجون بعضهم بعضا ;أكلت الأسماك بعضها بعضا

“Those who were rescued forgot each other,” not نسي الناجون بعضهم بعضا

التقوا ;نسي الناجون بعضهم بعضا

اشتكوا ;التقى بعضهم ببعض OR بعضهم ببعض

اشتكى بعضهم من بعض OR بعضهم من بعض

they complained from each other;

قاتل بعضهم بعضا or قاتلوا بعضهم بعضا

they fought each other.