The Discourse Function of Preposing in English and Arabic with Reference to Translation

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Abstract
The current study aimed to explore the phenomenon of preposing in the English and Arabic languages, and to identify its main salient characteristics and functions. It also attempted to address the most frequent translation problems associated with this phenomenon and to propose solutions to such problems based on sound scientific and theoretical grounds. Preposing refers to advancing a sentence constituent to the initial position for rhetorical or structural purposes. This study employed the descriptive analytical approach to delineate and analyze the various aspects of this phenomenon by reviewing a set of examples in multiple contexts. From a theoretical perspective, a sentence that involves a transition of one of its elements is considered a marked sentence as contrasted with the unmarked one that adopts the typical arrangement of words. This study concluded that syntactic discrepancies among languages might cause translational complications, particularly with word order. Moreover, it was found that fronting is used more frequently in Arabic than in English. Hence, a structural shift proposed by Catford (1965), is one of the suggested solutions to such complexities. Finally, it is worth noting that this study has some pedagogical implications, as the realization of language similarities and contrasts can contribute to facilitating the process of second language acquisition. In addition, this knowledge helps enrich the linguistic repertoire and the teaching content of language instructors.

Keywords: Arabic, discourse analysis, English, the function of preposing, translation problems

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Introduction

Living Languages have distinctive characteristics and functions entailed by diverse contexts and are worthy of research and exploration. There are still several linguistic phenomena that have not been amply identified by previous research. An illustration of a structural phenomenon that has not received sufficient attention is fronting or preposing in a language. Preposing is generally utilized for definitive stylistic and rhetorical discourse functions. It simply refers to advancing a sentence constituent to the sentence's initial position. Interestingly, this linguistic feature is available in both the English and Arabic languages.

However, there are still a few studies that address the similarities and differences between the English and Arabic languages concerning some shared linguistic aspects. Therefore, the current research aims to tackle the subject of preposing and provide a sufficient description of this phenomenon in the two languages. It also endeavors to provide a comprehensive analysis of it, review some examples, and illustrate the most critical purposes of fronting in both the English and Arabic languages. For instance, among the most common goals of preposing in the Arabic language are emphasis, personalization, and maintenance of sentence balance. Similarly, in the English language, words are occasionally prioritized for emphasis or to fulfill a specific structural form.

Moreover, it is worth noting that there exist similarities and differences among natural languages. One of the representations of these differences is, for example, the order of words in a sentence. By comparing Arabic and English, it is found that the English language follows the subject-verb-object (SVO) order. The Arabic language adopts two basic orders, verb-subject-object (VSO) and (SVO); the former is administered in verbal sentences and the latter is employed in nominal sentences.

These variations might occasionally create some problems in translation. One of the common errors that less competent translators often make is maintaining the word order of the Source Language (SL) while translating. Accordingly, a purely literal and awkward type of rendition occurs. Further, Battat (2004) pointed out that an identical sequence of words in one language might not mean the same in the other language. For example, the Arabic sentence المعلم مسح اللوح" might not mean the same as the English sentence: "The teacher cleaned the board.". The sequence of words in the Arabic sentence signaled a marked meaning that required moving the agent into the initial position. Therefore, a sentence that involves the transition of element positions is recognized as a marked form. In linguistics, markedness generally refers to how words are changed or added to give a distinct meaning.

From a theoretical point of view, Catford (1965) proposed a theory of translation that approached this problem known as “translation shift”. Catford identified two major types of shifts, namely level shift and category shift which in turn consist of structure shift, class shift, unit shift and intra-system shift. The type of shift being addressed in this study is classified as a “structure shift” based on Catford’s classification.
However, there is generally a shortage of studies that tackle the issue of preposing in English and Arabic and examine the differences between the two languages in this regard. Therefore, this study was mainly conducted to fill this research gap. It also aims to provide a comprehensive analytical description of this linguistic feature in the two tongues. It additionally seeks to review some translation problems arising from the discrepancy between the two languages regarding word order.

In essence, the objectives of the study can be summarized as follows: (1) to provide a holistic description of the phenomenon of preposing in the English and Arabic languages; (2) to analyze and review some examples related to this phenomenon and probe its common uses; (3) to identify the functions and purposes for its uses in the two languages, and (3) to discuss some translational problems related to this phenomenon and propose some solutions to these problems based on rational and scientific grounds.

In addition, the current study is expected to be of considerable significance for several reasons: (1) it will help identify research gaps that are of interest to future researchers who are drawn to this field of study; (2) it will draw the attention of translators to some translation dilemmas resulting from disparities among natural languages; (3) to propose solutions to such problems based on sound scientific and theoretical grounds; (4) to point out areas of commonalities between natural languages about some linguistic phenomena, which in turn enhances a thorough understanding of the syntax of the languages in question; and (5) to bridge the research gap caused by the lack of research in the area of philology of unrelated languages.

Finally, the present paper is structured as follows: the first part identifies the research problem, provides a background about the subject, and spells out the main terms used in this research. The second part reviews the previous research on the main topic and provides a theoretical framework for data analyses. It also introduces the concept of preposing in the two languages along with their sub-divisions and purposes. The third part presents the methodology of this research in addition to the procedures and data collection processes employed in the study. The following part reports the main findings along with a discussion of those findings in light of previous studies on the subject. Finally, the last part is devoted to the main conclusions, suggestions for further research, and some practical implications based on the main findings of the study.

Literature Review

Subject-Predicate/ Theme-Rheme Distinction

In traditional grammar, an English sentence is typically divided into two main parts: a subject and a predicate. The subject reports who perform the action or whom the sentence is about. The predicate is the part of the sentence that provides the information required to understand the subject. It usually contains a verb to specify the action done by the subject. In the following example: (John went to the beach) the element (John) serves as the subject, whereas the phrase (to the beach) functions as the predicate.
In linguistics, the terms (subject/ predicate) are equally known as (theme/ rheme) and (topic/comment) with the same functions, respectively. The rhyme is part of the sentence that provides further information about the topic, while the theme is the topic, or what is being talked about, instead of the rhyme or comment. As indicated by Halliday (2004), the theme is what is spoken about, whereas the rhyme is what is said about the theme.

The organization of constituents in the theme and rhyme is determined by several factors, especially what is given or known and new information in the clause. In other words, in any sentence, information that is supposed to be known, or provided, is usually placed before that which is supposed to be new. Meyer (2009) stated that one way to ensure that the flow of information is preserved is to use non-canonical constructions (also known as the marked word order), that is, syntactic structures in which the canonical order (or the unmarked order) of elements (for example in English SVO) is rearranged. This notion is further illustrated in the following section.

**Marked Versus Unmarked Word Order**

Each language has a dominant word order to determine the arrangement of constituents within a sentence. The term "word order" refers to the order of elements in a clause, parts which are often each realized by phrases or clauses rather than just one word. The typical word order of an English sentence is SVO. Jespersen (2006) claimed that English "has developed a tolerably fixed word order which in the great majority of cases shows without fail what is the Subject of the sentence" (p. 66). However, Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad, and Finegan (1999) argued that even though the use of the core elements in the clause is heavily restricted by structure, variation does exist even in the core. These variations are affected by some factors or discourse functions such as information flow, weight distribution, or to convey a special effect and emphasis.

Meyer (2009) pointed out that the regular SVO order is considered unmarked as it represents the most frequent word order in English and would not need any context to be considered acceptable. On the other hand, the OSV order is considered marked and thus requires a specific context to be considered acceptable.

In standard Arabic, the word orders SVO and VSO are both possible. The former applies to a nominal Arabic sentence, and the latter signals a verbal one. Nevertheless, alternations in the order of segments within an Arabic sentence do occur to serve various purposes, which are illustrated in the following section of this paper.

**Preposing in English**

There are several positions where preposing or fronting can occur in English structures. These positions include noun phrase fronting, verb phrase fronting, adjective phrase fronting, adverb phrase fronting, fronting of prepositional phrases, left dislocation, inversion, Wh-fronting, cleft fronting, and pseudo-cleft fronting. The discussion here is only confined to preposing of the four main parts of speech which are: nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs:
Noun Phrase Preposing

According to Emonds (1976), noun phrases that function as direct objects could be fronted as in the following examples:

What subject can't you understand?
Her husband was killed by this criminal.
History I just can't understand.

Verb Phrase Preposing

Emonds (1976) asserted that verb phrases can be fronted to express emphasis:

Mary once predicted that John would pass an exam, and pass one he now has.
This sentence was derived from the following underlying structure:

Mary once predicted that John pass an exam eventually, and he has passed one.

Adjective Phrase Preposing

Adjectives that function as the head of an adjective phrase can be moved to the initial position:

Long and tidy, her hair played in the breeze.

According to Allan (1986), predicate adjectives can be fronted for poetic purposes, as in the following example:

Bright were the stars.

Adverb Preposing

Emonds (1976) pointed out that English adverbs can be fronted in several ways. However, when they are fronted, they are marked. Look at the following example:

Rarely does John drink coffee.
There runs the thief.

Moreover, Zhiber (2020) argued that there are two types of inversion in the English language: grammatical and stylistic. The stylistic type is typically used to reflect the speaker’s emotional state. It usually serves to give the utterance an “emotional coloring” because in this case, the emphasis is on one of the sentence constituents, particularly in literary discourse. He also adds that inversion is not to be considered a breach of the norm of standard English. Expressive or stylistic inversion can be found in the following examples:

You wore my present can it be so gorgeous (Kochetova, 2013).
How dare you hurt him!
What a piece of work is a man! (Shakespeare, Hamlet 2:2)

On the other hand, grammatical inversion refers to a syntactic structure where two sentence members exchange or alter their canonical positions. It can be found in the following example:

All along one wall climbed a beautiful, rambling rose
Or as in:

Never have I seen such a handsome man
Preposing in Arabic

Fronting in the Arabic language has several positions, including but not limited to fronting of object, topicalization, fronting of adverbs, and fronting of prepositional phrases. The most common types of preposing are briefly illustrated below as stated by Aljorjani (1992).

**Preposing of Object**

The object of a sentence can be placed before the subject to indicate personalization. Look at the following examples:

ضرب زيداً عمرو
زيداً ضربت
(It is Zayd whom I have beaten)

**Topicalization**

The topic of the sentence can be placed in the initial position as in the following example:

قائم زيد
Zayd is standing up
The unmarked structure of this sentence is: زيد قائم

**Preposing of Adverb**

The adverb can be advanced in the sentence to denote the specification of a manner:

جاء ضاحكاً زيد
(Zayd has come laughing)

**Preposing of Prepositional Phrases**

The prepositional phrase can be advanced in Arabic to indicate the specification of a place, as in the following example:

في الدار زيد (تقديم الجار والمجرور)
In the house, is Zayd

عندك عمرو (تقديم الظرف)
In your home, is Ammr.

**General Purposes of Preposing in the Arabic Language**

Alsakaki (1987) stated that the fronting of a particular constituent in the Arabic language could occur for the following common purposes:

1. To capture the attention of the hearer or reader.
2. To hasten the sense of joy or adversity or the feelings of optimism or pessimism.
3. Personalization and specification of action or manner.
4. To convey excitement or suspense.
5. For exclamation, praise, slander, or exaltation.
6. To maintain sentence balance and rhythm.

**Empirical Considerations**

Preposing is an interesting linguistic phenomenon that is found in English and Arabic languages alike and is worthy of attention and exploration. In literature, few studies dealt with this
phenomenon to determine its salient characteristics and address the problems associated with it, especially those about translation. However, Saad (2010) investigated the commonalities and differences between the two languages proposing to draw some conclusions. It was found that although both languages employ this linguistic technique, Arabic overweighs English regarding the utilization of this phenomenon to achieve specific linguistic and aesthetic purposes and benefits. As was stated by Veselovská (2011), "English, compared with many other languages, shows less freedom in the distribution of individual words/constituents in a clause." (p. 1805).

Another range of studies tackled the subject to provide an adequate description and analysis of this issue. For example, Veselovská (2011) extensively studied inversion and fronting as two English linguistic aspects. He found that although these phenomena can interact, they are the results of two independent transformations, which both require the presence of the projection of a complementizer (CP). He also demonstrated how the CP level can be "split" to accommodate projections, including both topic and emphasis. In the same vein, Urk (2022) claimed that what was previously treated as a single type of preposing, known as "topicalization", really involves two distinct subtypes which differ both intonationally and pragmatically.

Further studies have focused attention on language according to use. For instance, Mehdi (2009) argued that the translation of fronting is not a straightforward task due to the linguistic variations between the SL and TL, which may hinder the translation process. Thus, the translator must do his best to convey this salient feature to the TL to achieve the optimal equivalence, and hence fidelity to the ST can be realized. Likewise, Menacere (1995) discussed the potential difficulties in translating Arabic into English regarding word order. The analysis concluded that Arabic word order is more complimentary than English with Arabic in general allowing any transformation of the major constituents without loss of syntactic or semantic facets of the sentence. However, the study concluded that this flexibility of Arabic word order might cause some translating complications. Ghomri and Souadkia (2020) came up with a similar finding as they pointed out that Standard Arabic is considered to be a language with flexible word order. Hence, there exist word-order patterns in both VOS and SVO languages, with the latter being more frequently used.

Farghal and Kalakh (2017) studied English focus structures in Arabic translation. The findings showed that English focus structures create a problematic area that requires a high degree of professionalism on the translator’s part. In addition to accounting for preposing as a primary syntactic device for focusing a particular sentence element, inversion, and clefting as second-layer emphatic elements are primarily missed in Arabic translation. Similarly, Akan, Karim, and Chowdhury (2019) explained that there are some problems related to the syntax/structure of the two languages (i.e., Arabic and English) because they belong to two distinct language families, among other reasons. Syntactic asymmetries between Arabic and English desire more attention from translators. Essentially, translators need to be apprehensive of the incongruities between the two languages at the sentence level which involves word order variation.
The issue of translation shift was also tackled by other studies. For instance, Hijjo and Kadhim (2017) analyzed the grammatical shift in the English-Arabic translation of BBC media news text. The analysis concluded that, in general, translators of BBC News from English into Arabic applied all types of shifts to maintain the meaning of the SL and to sustain the quality of the message. However, the results suggested that BBC translators failed to deliver the same message quality when they applied structural shifts while translating the passive voice into the active voice and, in some cases, of unit-shifts. Similarly, Almutairi, Al kous, and Zitouni (2020) explored translation shifts in the translation of news articles from English into Arabic. The findings showed that the structural shifts involved word order, passive-active, or nominal-verbal sentence structures. The least common category shifts in the process of translation are class shifts which showed that the translator found target text equivalences that have the same part of speech as the source text items. The study concluded that category shifts were adopted in the translation to fill the linguistic gap between the two languages.

Another study by Djamila (2010) examined how frequently first-year master students of English shift the source text (Arabic) lexical cohesive patterns in the target language (English). The findings indicated that the students moved most of the ST linguistic ties, and their shifts were not accurate in establishing textual and discoursal equivalence. This happened because the students lacked competence in interpretations and in dealing with a text as a whole unit of discourse. Lastly, a study carried out by Jabak1 in 2016, examined translation shifts regarding translation from English into Arabic or vice versa. The results revealed that translation transformations are paramount, mainly if the source language and the target language belong to two distinct families, such as English and Arabic. Finally, a collection of linguistic permutations, namely word order, parts of speech, word choice, tense, number, and voice, were elaborated to make translation shifts more intelligible and more practical.

Method

This study adopts the descriptive analytical research design. The descriptive approach is a research method that relies on extrapolation and collection of previous data, and then displaying it according to a specific pattern.

The analytical approach is also utilized to address analytically some translation problems arising from variations in the two languages concerning word order. The analytical research design uses facts or information already available and scrutinizes them to evaluate the material and draw conclusions.

Data Collection and Analysis

Initially, data about preposing in both languages were collected from documented sources and presented provisionally. The aspect in question was described and evaluated in terms of features and rhetorical purposes for using this technique, the most prominent use of which is emphasis.
In addition, some translation problems related to this phenomenon, which arise mainly from the contrast between the two languages, were discussed. Then, the appropriate mechanism to handle this problem was also applied by reviewing some practical examples.

After that, the results were presented and associated with previous studies to identify the areas of compatibility or discrepancy with them. Lastly, the research ended with drawing some conclusions and recommendations.

**Research Procedures**

The procedures followed in writing this research were:
- First, a survey of preposing in both languages was presented.
- Then, a collection of examples and illustrations were demonstrated to support the discussion about the subject and clarify how the two languages consider this topic.
- After that, some translation complications originating from the two language peculiarities were examined and resolved.
- Finally, some findings and conclusions were reported.

**Findings**

As was previously mentioned, variations among languages might invite some translation problems. Regarding word order, the typical sequence of words in an English sentence is subject-verb-object (SVO).

As for the Arabic language, the order slightly differs in relation to the Arabic verbal sentence; wherein the arrangement is: verb-subject-object (VSO). One of the most common translation errors occurs when the translator maintains the SL language order of words, eventually producing a literal or semi-Arabic, or semi-English language form. Look at these examples:

1. The boy went to school.
   
   الولد ذهب إلى المدرسة

2. Cathy ate the apple.
   
   كاثي أكلت التفاحة.

As seen in the translations above, the translator conveyed the intended meaning of the SL message. Yet, structurally speaking, the two translation versions did not conform to the rules of the TL regarding the typical sequence of words.

In other words, the translator has to alter the constituent's positions within the sentence to adapt to the target language's grammar rules. In the two examples above, the verbs (ذهب، أكلت) have to be advanced to the sentence initial-position to comply with the syntactic rules of the target language. Therefore, the correct translations for the two sentences above should read as follows:

1. The boy went to school.
   
   ذهب الولد إلى المدرسة.

2. Cathy ate the apple.
   
   أكلت كاثي التفاحة.
الأكلة كاثي التفاحة.

By analogy, this rule applies to all similar contexts that contain a verb when translating between the English and Arabic languages. Similarly, translation errors might occur when translating adjective phrases between English and Arabic. In English, the adjective proceeds the noun it modifies, whereas in Arabic the opposite is true.

Consider the following examples:

إنها فتاة لطيفة.
She is a nice girl.

When translating such a sentence, the translator should pay attention to the ordering of elements in an adjective phrase. The adjective should be placed before the noun to conform to the rules of English structures.

Although errors of this kind are rare, they are potential, particularly by novice TL learners and translators. To sum up, these errors principally occur due to distinctions among languages concerning the original arrangement of words.

Discussion

This study proposed some critical findings, the most prominent of which is that the phenomenon of preposing is available in both languages English and Arabic. This finding is consistent with the outcomes of previous studies such as Saad’s (2010), Veselovská’s (2011), and Matthew’s (2003).

In addition, it was found that the differences in the two languages in the standard order of words in the sentence might cause some translation errors. This was also suggested by Mehdi (2009), Menacere (1995) and Farghal and Kalakh (2017). In addition, Ghazala (2008) indicated that the problem with translation students is that students mostly translate English into the exact word order in Arabic, regardless of the more normal nominal and verbal word orders. However, he pointed out that equal English-Arabic word order can be maintained in some cases. It is used, as an exception, not the rule, when greater emphasis than usual is intended to be put on the subject.

As in the following example:

الزلزال حدث أمس
(“The earthquake happened yesterday”)

By the same token, Akan, Karim, and Chowdhury (2019) illustrated that translating an utterance like: "ذهب نجين إلى جدة" into "Went Najin to Jeddah" is risky since it disrupts meaning due to word-order mismatches. Hence, the words in the sentence above should be converted into "Najin went to Jeddah".

Moreover, there is a bundle of other interesting studies that dealt with the issue of translation shift such as Hijjo and Kadhim (2017), Almutairi et al. (2020), and Djamila (2010). These studies concluded that the students’ shifts were not accurate in establishing textual and discoursal equivalence. Further, these alternations were adopted in the translation to fill the linguistic gap between the two languages.
In addition, Khudoyorovich, Rasuljanovna, Khalmuratovna, and Eshkobilovna (2020) argued that each language has unique rules. A word choice or phrase that sounds acceptable in one language may become miscellaneous when translated into another language, and the outcome might be distasteful. Therefore, a translator has the right to omit something, recreate it, simplify it, or add something to make the utterance as translucent to the reader as the original. In this case, the translator does not correct the author's text, nor does he decorate it. But the translator delivers the meaning utilizing artistic words, styles, and complex syntactic devices of the target language not through plain syntax or dry jargon.

From a theoretical point of view, a theory put forward by Catford (1965) laid the foundation for this argument. Catford (1965) pointed out that translation shifts refer to the changes in small linguistic forms that occur between the source text and target text. He classified two main types of shifts, namely level shift and category shift. Category shift, in turn, is divided into structure shift, class shift, unit shift, and intra-system shift.

The type of shift that applies to the current discussion wherein words alter their positions through translation is called “structure shift”. In other terms, according to Catford, structure shift simply refers to the alternation of the sequence in a sentence. Finally, it can be concluded that, as indicated by Saad (2010), fronting is indispensable in the language for rhetorical and structural purposes and to achieve some stylistic functions.

Limitations of the Study

There are two limitations to this study:
1. Due to restrictions of time and space, the discussion is only confined to preposing as a common linguistic phenomenon in the Arabic language, yet, there is no mention of postposing, which is another aspect of Arabic closely related to the former one.
2. This research was also confined to describing preposing in the two languages and its most prominent positions and characteristics. Nonetheless, this paper does not involve a contrastive analysis of the similarities and differences between the two languages in this regard.

Conclusion

This study aimed to scrutinize preposing as a linguistic aspect in English and Arabic and explore its salient functions and purposes. It was found that this aspect is employed in the two languages, though its use is more recurring in Arabic than in English. Amongst the most common purposes of fronting in the Arabic language is an emphasis in addition to other rhetorical and aesthetic purposes. Moreover, it was found that translating between languages is one of the contexts that necessitate a shift of sentence constituents’ canonical positions particularly in the case of languages that have variant word order patterns. Translating into Arabic from English, for instance, requires the transition of a verb into the sentence’s earliest position in the case of verbal Arabic sentences. This transformation is needed to adhere to the rules of the Arabic language. Unlike English which adopts a subject-verb-object word order, Arabic follows a verb-subject-
The discourse function of preposing in English and Arabic with reference to the object sequence of words in the verbal sentence. Therefore, translators ought to pay attention while transmitting meaning between these two languages and ought to take into consideration the syntactic discrepancies between them. Finally, it is worth noting that the descriptive and analytical study of discourse phenomena is of linguistic significance. This type of analysis enhances the understanding of the features and peculiarities of the language under investigation. It also has pedagogical implications for the teacher and the student alike. As for students, it can speed up the progress of second language acquisition. As for instructors, it can raise their linguistic awareness and supplement their instruction with teaching content and themes.

**Practical Implications**

The implications of the current study can be summarized as follows:

1. Studying similarities and differences between unrelated languages enhances an in-depth understanding of these languages and confirms the principle that languages descend from a common original language.
2. It also contributes to enriching the linguistic repertoire with the outcomes of these studies and fulfilling the lack of research in this field.
3. The outputs of this study will help refine translators' skills, as some translation errors were discussed in this research.
4. This study enhances awareness of the linguistic and rhetorical functions of language in various contexts. It also shows the purposes that require transforming the positions of elements within a sentence.
5. Studying the similarities and differences between languages facilitates the process of language learning and the positive transfer of similar aspects.
6. Understanding language peculiarities enriches the teaching content of a language teacher and opens new vistas for researchers interested in this field.

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