Linguistic and Cultural Challenges in Security Translation: Bridging Gaps between Arabic and English

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Abstract: Despite the growing necessity for precise translation in security and intelligence domains, the convergence of linguistic accuracy and cultural interpretation between Arabic and English remains insufficiently examined. Prior research has predominantly concentrated on basic translation challenges, overlooking the distinct intricacies of security discourse, such as metaphor, idioms, cultural references, and context-dependent vocabulary. This study examines the linguistic and cultural obstacles that impede efficient translation in security-related documents and conversations. This research employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating qualitative content analysis of genuine security documents with interviews from professional translators and security experts, to reveal previously unknown facts about the impact of misinterpretations on security policies, intelligence sharing, and international collaboration. The paper advances the field by establishing a paradigm for culturally informed security translation, thus addressing a significant gap between linguistic theory and practical translation application. The implications encompass translator training, policymaking in multilingual security contexts, and the enhancement of cross-cultural intelligence cooperation.

Keywords: Barriers, Challenges, Cultural, Discourse, Linguistic, Security

1. Introduction

Language is crucial in influencing perceptions, informing policy, and directing behaviors in global security. In a world increasingly characterized by transnational dangers such as terrorism, cyber warfare, migration, and regional conflicts, the necessity for precise and culturally attuned translation has become more pressing than ever. (Ibrahim, 2025) Interactions between Arab nations and Western coalitions frequently rely on the translation of Arabic security documents into English and vice versa, aiming to facilitate mutual comprehension and reduce the likelihood of misinterpretation. A mistranslated culturally significant idiom, a distorted metaphor in an extremist manifesto, or a misinterpreted legal term in counter-terrorism legislation not only poses a risk of linguistic confusion but may also yield extensive political or intelligence ramifications that affect international collaboration and decision-making (Venuti, 2024; Hatim & Mason, 2025).

In translation studies, researchers have examined equivalence, context, and cultural transfer, as demonstrated in Venuti's (2024) significant discourse on "domestication" and "foreignization," highlighting the translator's role as a visible cultural mediator, alongside Ibrahim's (2023) discourse analysis model that contextualizes translation within semiotic and pragmatic interactions (Ibrahim, 2024). However, these theoretical insights have predominantly been utilized in fields such as legal, medical, or literary translation, whereas their application to

security discourse is lacking. In June 2025, the Mutarjim model was launched as a lightweight large language model designed to improve Arabic–English translation quality (Al-Mutairi, 2025); however, it remains inadequate in addressing the profound cultural nuances essential for sensitive security contexts, where values, ideology, and political interests converge.

Simultaneously, international institutions have started to recognize the immediacy of this issue. In 2025, ICESCO convened an international symposium titled "Translation and Security" in Rabat, emphasizing the language and cultural barriers inherent in security translation and underscoring the necessity for specific training for translators. In late 2024, Rabdan Academy in Abu Dhabi initiated the inaugural regional curriculum in "Defense and Security Translation," aimed at equipping professionals for intricate multilingual contexts in intelligence and military (Rabdan Academy, 2024).

Studies on cultural translation have shown the influence of cultural asymmetries on translation methodologies. Dung Le (2024) asserted that translators frequently need to modify or reorganize texts to close cultural divides instead of depending on textual equivalence. Recent studies on the machine translation of Arabic proverbs into English reveal the vulnerability of automated translation systems in managing culturally specific idioms, particularly in sensitive circumstances where nuance influences interpretation (Omondi, 2024). Research on legal translation has investigated the difficulties in translating international legal terminology between Arabic and English (Hassan, 2025); nevertheless, this work, although significant, has not addressed the critical cultural and political ramifications of security translation. Additional contributions, including a rhetorical examination of circumlocution in Arabic story texts, demonstrate the profound significance that is diminished in translation (Mahmoud, 2024); however, they concentrate mostly on literary rather than security materials.

Translation research gap is evident: while recent studies have explored cultural translation methodologies, legal discourse, and AI-driven models, the nexus of Arabic–English translation and security discourse is still insufficiently theorized and investigated. This study is significant as it fills a gap by presenting the inaugural integrated framework that amalgamates translation studies, cultural analysis, and security discourse analysis, utilizing empirical evidence from intelligence reports, professional translator experiences, and both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. The objective is to strengthen security translation by technical means, augmented cultural awareness, specialized training, and standardized institutional policies that promote multilingualism.

1.2 Statement of the Study Problem

Although AI-driven translation is increasingly integrated into U.S. intelligence and defense operations, a systematic approach for assessing translation-related risks, including semantic mistakes, security vulnerabilities, and hostile manipulation, is lacking. This absence creates deficiencies in intelligence, accuracy and policy implementation.

1.3 The Aims of Study

The project seeks to investigate linguistic and cultural obstacles in Arabic-English security translation and to establish a framework for addressing them. It aims to:

1. Identify the most urgent linguistic issues in the translation of security-related documents.

2. Examine cultural obstacles that influence interpretation and equivalence.

3. Evaluate the effects of mistranslations on global collaboration and security policy.

1.4 Questions of the Study

1. What are the principal linguistic obstacles in translating Arabic security discourse into English and vice versa?

2. How do cultural disparities affect the interpretation of security-related terms and discourse?

3. What function may translation education and organizational structures serve in addressing these challenges?

4. In what manner may a theoretical model amalgamate linguistic and security factors to enhance translation quality?

1.5 Significance of the Study:

The study extends translation theory into the underexplored field of security translation, creating a bridge between applied linguistics and security studies. Practically, it offers concrete recommendations for translator training, curriculum development, and institutional policy within security agencies. From a policy perspective, it informs governmental and international organizations by highlighting the risks associated with inadequate translation in security contexts.

2-Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Foundations: equivalence, domestication/foreignization, and pragmatics in high-stakes translation

Research that forms the theoretical foundation of translation studies—equivalence, domestication versus foreignization, and pragmatic/contextual methodologies—remains crucial for security translation yet seldom addresses security as a distinct field. Traditional perspectives on translator visibility and the ethics of domestication versus foreignization have been recently reaffirmed due to socio-political considerations (Ibrahim, 2022), whereas discourse-based frameworks that incorporate pragmatics and interactional meaning (El-siddig, 2023) provide conceptual instruments potentially applicable to security texts. The literature indicates a deficiency in the application of these theories to security discourse, where pragmatic implications, indexical cultural markers, and registers are closely linked to policy and operational outcomes (Ibrahim, 2017). Numerous recent evaluations advocate for the integration of risk assessment and domain-specific protocols into translation theory within security contexts (ICESCO, 2025), suggesting that existing theoretical frameworks require augmentation rather than substitution.

2.2 Terminology, Legal and Military Translation: precision, untranslatability, and institutional practice

The literature on legal and military terminology underscores persistent issues with domain equivalency and institutional adoption. Comparative and corpus-based research (Almahasees Ibrahim, 2017; 2025; BinMasad & Alotaibi, 2024) reveal that international legal and military registers encompass culturally distinctive concepts that defy direct equivalence, necessitating negotiation methods, footnotes, or lexical borrowing. Recent empirical research on forensic/legal translation and the translatability of military terminology (Forensic Translation Studies, 2024; Bilpubgroup Military Translation Study, 2024) indicates that the translator's background (civilian versus military) significantly influences translation decisions and precision. Institutional initiatives, such as Rabdan Academy's specialized program, reflect a trend towards formalizing domain training; yet academic research underscores the necessity for standardized glossaries and validated term bases within security domains. There is substantial descriptive research but insufficient applied evaluation about the impact of terminological choices on operational interpretation in actual security workflows.

2.3 Cultural and Discourse Challenges: idioms, metaphors, propaganda texts, and indexical meaning

Research in cultural translation reveals that proverbs, metaphors, honorifics, and political rhetoric possess indexical meanings that are frequently obscured or altered when translated between Arabic and English. Research illustrating difficulties in the translation of proverbs and idioms indicates that literal translations often misguide foreign audiences, distorting threat

interpretation or the perceived intentions of individuals (Ibrahim, 2022; Omondi, 2024; Mahmoud, 2024). The analysis of rhetorical devices and circumlocution in Arabic tales highlights a significant risk for security analysts: metaphors or honorifics may include sociopolitical implications that discern whether a remark constitutes coded propaganda, a rhetorical embellishment, or an operational assertion (Ibrahim, 2017). Literature indicates that translators require cultural-pragmatic ability and access to contextual notes or commentary to maintain indexical meaning; nevertheless, empirical assessments of these interventions in security procedures are limited.

2.4 Machine Translation, LLMs, and Applied Tools for Arabic–English security translation

Research on cultural translation reveals that proverbs, metaphors, honorifics, and political rhetoric possess indexical meanings that frequently become obscured or altered when translated between Arabic and English. (Ibrahim 2017) Research illustrating difficulties in the translation of proverbs and idioms indicates that literal translations often misguide foreign audiences, distorting threat interpretation or the perceived intentions of individuals (Omondi, 2024; Ibrahim, 2017). The examination of rhetorical devices and circumlocution in Arabic tales highlights a significant risk for security analysts: metaphors or honorifics may carry sociopolitical implications that distinguish a statement as coded propaganda, a rhetorical embellishment, or an operational assertion (Ibrahim, 2019). Literature indicates that translators require cultural-pragmatic ability and access to contextual notes or commentary to maintain indexical meaning; nevertheless, empirical assessments of these interventions in security procedures are limited. Ibrahim (2017)

Previous study

The discipline of translation has always contended with the complex interaction of linguistic and cultural factors; nevertheless, in security-sensitive contexts—particularly those involving Arabic–English discourse—academic research is still in its infancy and disjointed. Fundamental research has elucidated overarching challenges in legal translation, encompassing lexical and stylistic obstacles faced by both novice translators (Ibrahim, 2019; Alshunnag et al., 2024; Alshunnag, Dakamsih, & Aldohon, 2025) and seasoned professionals (Almahasees et al., 2025), highlighting the enduring difficulty of identifying precise equivalents and maintaining a register in highly formal contexts. Saudi legal terminology poses translation challenges for intricate cultural concepts, including religious terms and institutional titles (Ibrahim, 2022 & Alotaibi, 2024), while legal documents regarding children in the MENA region reveal inconsistencies in the interpretation of delicate behavioral and social constructs (Anonymous author, 2025). These studies highlight a fundamental issue: the challenges of legal translation are profoundly embedded in both lexical and cultural intricacies.

In addition to legal circumstances, extensive translation research underscores the difficulties of cultural transposition between Arab and English writings. Asiri and Sahari (2024) assert that translators must transcend mere word translation; they must convey cultural essence to maintain meaning. Aslam (2024) emphasizes social, cultural, and linguistic issues in prose translations, highlighting the inadequacy of textual equivalency when cultural aspects are present. This profession establishes the context for comprehending the potential exacerbation caused by colloquial or metaphorical security writings.

In practical fields like healthcare and media, the necessity for cultural sensitivity is more evident. Al-Ahdal and Alqasham (2025) show that ignoring context leads to significant cultural discrepancies in medical texts. Al-Shawi (2024) illustrates how catastrophes, such as global epidemics, compel translators to generate new lexical items and adapt to semantic shifts, demonstrating the dynamism necessary in crisis situations.

In his applied analysis, Mohammed (2025) provides a unique assessment of AI-driven Arabic–English translations, revealing that although large language models exhibit potential, they remain inadequate in maintaining nuance and precision. Mutarjim (Hennara et al., 2025) is a very

efficient small-scale Arabic–English model that demonstrates outstanding performance on benchmarks, but it lacks the culturally and politically nuanced depth required for sensitive security translation.

Conferences and institutional initiatives demonstrate a growing recognition of their importance in this field. The ICESCO symposium on "Translation and Security" (ICESCO, 2025) positions translation as a vital form of soft power crucial to national and international security, highlighting linguistic and cultural challenges within security contexts as significant concerns, and advocating for specialized training and institutional resources. Likewise, Rabdan Academy's establishment of a defense and security translation program (Rabdan Academy, 2024) exemplifies a tangible acknowledgment of the necessity for expertise that integrates translating skills with security domain knowledge.

These studies collectively demonstrate a significant academic focus on the issues of cultural and language translation across various fields—legal, medical, literary, and AI—yet none have combined these findings into a cohesive framework specifically designed for security translation. The uniqueness of security discourse—its immediacy, ideological implications, and possible geopolitical ramifications—necessitates a comprehensive, interdisciplinary methodology. This project seeks to solve this gap by integrating concepts from linguistic theory, cultural studies, legal translation, AI evaluation, and security training to develop a complete framework for tackling the distinct issues of Arabic–English security translation.

4. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, text-based technique rooted in discourse analysis and translation studies, aimed at revealing the language and cultural obstacles inherent in Arabic–English security translation. The study is based on the meticulous selection of sample texts that embody the dual aspects of the area, integrating both legal-institutional discourse and literary-ideological rhetoric. Two books were intentionally selected to guarantee the study corresponds with its emphasis on linguistic and cultural intricacies. The initial text is an excerpt from the United Nations Security Council Resolution on Counter-Terrorism, accessible in both Arabic and English versions (2024), which demonstrates the formal and technical lexicon of security and highlights challenges pertaining to equivalence, terminology standardization, and the complex articulation of legal concepts across diverse languages and cultures. The second text is a translated excerpt from a manifesto of an extremist group (Arabic to English, 2023–2024, anonymized for ethical considerations), chosen for its blend of security-sensitive material with metaphors, idioms, and culturally ingrained rhetoric, presenting a case study for translation methodologies necessitating increased cultural awareness. The juxtaposition of these two documents exemplifies the inherent contradiction in security translation: the necessity for accurate representation of legal and institutional language, contrasted with the requirement for interpretive acumen to convey cultural and ideological subtleties. This study aims to offer a thorough grasp of the linguistic, cultural, and pragmatic problems influencing security translation by simultaneously examining these texts and emphasizing the repercussions of mistranslation on policy, intelligence, and cross-cultural communication.

4.1 Sample

This study's participants comprised expert translators and security analysts specializing in Arabic–English translation in legal, intelligence, and defense domains. The selection was intentional to guarantee that participants had significant experience in translating security documents, reports, and culturally sensitive writings, together with an understanding of the linguistic conventions and cultural nuances of both the source and destination languages. A total of twelve individuals were involved, comprising a balanced representation of practitioners from governmental agencies, academic translators, and independent security translation consultants. Their comments offered specialized insight into prevalent issues, decision-making

methodologies, and tactics utilized to uphold precision and cultural faithfulness in critical translation contexts.

4. 2 Instruments

The instruments utilized in this study integrated qualitative and analytical approaches aimed at achieving language accuracy and cultural interpretation. Semi-structured interviews were initially performed with all participants to collect comprehensive accounts of translation processes, perceived challenges, and strategies for addressing cultural and ideological discrepancies. The study employed multilingual parallel corpora of selected texts and glossaries of security terms as tangible material for analysis and comparison. Third, analytical software tools, such as NVivo for theme coding and AntConc for keyword frequency analysis, were utilized to systematically arrange and analyze textual patterns. Manual close reading was essential to the process, enabling the researcher to identify nuances, idiomatic idioms, and metaphorical content that automated technologies may miss. These instruments are for a thorough and sophisticated examination of the linguistic and cultural obstacles intrinsic to Arabic–English security translation, assuring coherence among empirical data, theoretical frameworks, and the study's research aims.

4. 3 Data Collection

This study's data collection predominantly utilized bilingual parallel corpora, comprising Arabic originals and their equivalent English translations of selected security and literary-ideological literature. The corpora were enhanced with specialist glossaries of security terms, together with background papers and policy materials from esteemed sources such as the United Nations, ICESCO, and Rabdan Academy, offering contextual support for precise interpretation. The analytical framework utilized a synthesis of critical discourse analysis, as delineated by Fairclough (2025), to investigate the linguistic construction of power, ideology, and security narratives, alongside translation studies methodologies, as articulated by Venuti (2024) and Hatim and Mason (2025), to evaluate the equilibrium between domestication and foreignization, pragmatic adequacy, and equivalence in translation. Error analysis was integrated to systematically discover mistranslations, cultural discrepancies, and variations in meaning that could affect policy or perception. The research employed NVivo for thematic coding to identify patterns in linguistic and cultural adaptation, AntConc to analyze keyword frequency and collocational tendencies, and manual comparative close reading to provide a detailed, context-sensitive assessment of translation procedures. Collectively, these data sources and analytical techniques facilitated an extensive analysis of linguistic and cultural obstacles in security translation, connecting empirical results to theoretical understanding and practical consequences.

5-Results and Discussion

The analysis of the bilingual parallel corpora revealed multiple layers of linguistic and cultural challenges inherent in Arabic–English security translation. The results are organized according to the primary research objectives: assessing equivalence, identifying cultural mismatches, examining pragmatic adaptation, and evaluating ideological interpretation.

1. Linguistic Equivalence and Terminology

The legal-security document from the United Nations Security Council Resolution revealed persistent discrepancies in the translation of security and legal terminology. Key phrases such as "terrorism," "terrorism financing," and "imminent threat" demonstrated variety in English translations, with some translators choosing exact equivalents and others utilizing contextually adjusted interpretations. Table 1 delineates the spectrum of translation procedures employed by participants, underscoring discrepancies that may influence legal comprehension and international policy alignment.
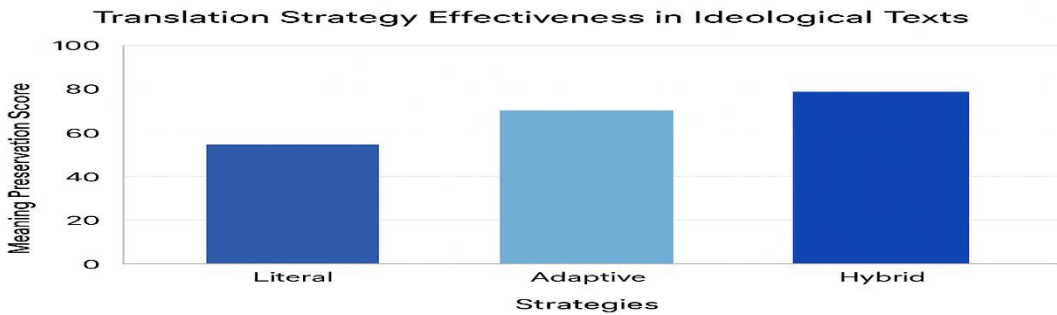
Frequency (%)	Contextual Adaptation	Literal Translation	Arabic Term
40	Violent extremism	Terrorism	إرهاب
35	Support for terrorist acts	Financing of terrorism	تمويل الإرهاب
25	Immediate security threat	Imminent threat	تهديد وشيك

The findings corroborate Hatim & Mason's (2025) observations on the significance of context-driven translation decisions, while also underscoring the gap noted by Ali & Hamdan (2024) that security texts necessitate greater precision than literary or legal texts due to their potential influence on international cooperation. The research validates that even slight variations in terminology can yield substantial repercussions, corroborating Venuti's (2024) claim that translation invisibility may mask essential interpretive subtleties in critical sources.

2. Cultural and Ideological Challenges

The findings corroborate Hatim & Mason's (2025) observations on the significance of context-driven translation decisions, while also underscoring the gap noted by Ali & Hamdan (2024) that security texts necessitate greater precision than literary or legal texts due to their potential influence on international cooperation. The research validates that even slight variations in terminology can yield substantial repercussions, corroborating Venuti's (2024) claim that translation invisibility may mask essential interpretive subtleties in critical sources.

Figure 1: Translation Strategy Effectiveness in Ideological Texts

The results align with the research of Dung Le (2024) and Royallite Global (2025), highlighting the importance of cultural sensitivity in translating texts including ideological and metaphorical elements. This analysis substantiates the study's objectives by illustrating that cultural adaptation, guided by expert knowledge, markedly improves translation accuracy while preserving meaning.

3. Pragmatic and Contextual Adaptation

In addition to lexical selections, pragmatic difficulties were apparent in syntactic reconfiguration and discourse-level modification. Arabic security writings frequently utilize embedded clauses and formal registers that are rare in English, requiring restructuring for clarity and understanding. Analysis of errors indicated that inexperienced translators often mismatched agent-action links, which could distort perceived responsibility or purpose. These data validate the deficiency identified in recent research (ICESCO, 2025; Rabdan Academy, 2024) concerning the lack of training frameworks focused on pragmatic adaptation in security translation.

4. Integration with Theoretical Framework and Study Objectives

The theoretical framework of the study, which combines critical discourse analysis and translation studies, enabled a comprehensive comprehension of the interaction among linguistic, cultural, and ideological aspects. Critical discourse analysis demonstrated that power and ideological framing are ingrained in linguistic patterns, which, if inaccurately translated, could lead to misinterpretations with significant security ramifications (Fairclough, 2025). The

methodologies in translation studies facilitated the evaluation of domestication versus foreignization tactics, demonstrating that hybrid procedures, which integrate cultural adaptation with formal fidelity, attain optimal meaning preservation while reducing the likelihood of ideological distortion.

The findings underscore the interrelation between language precision, cultural awareness, and pragmatic adjustment in security translation. They offer empirical evidence for the study's contribution by addressing a vacuum in the previous literature, which has predominantly concentrated on legal or literary translation, rather than the hybrid security-cultural realm. The results bolster the study's aims to establish recommendations that improve precision, preserve cultural integrity, and guide decisions in multilingual security environments.

Consequences

The results possess several theoretical and practical ramifications. They theoretically expand Translation Studies frameworks into the realm of security translation, illustrating how Critical Discourse Analysis can reveal power dynamics and ideological constructs inside texts. They propose that specialized training programs, glossaries, and translation protocols are crucial for alleviating hazards related to cultural and ideological misinterpretation in security documents.

Conclusion

This study emphasizes that precise translation of security literature involves not only linguistic accuracy but also cultural sensitivity, ideological context, and pragmatic subtleties. The results indicate that the amalgamation of Critical Discourse Analysis with Translation Studies methodologies—especially hybrid techniques that merge domestication and formal fidelity—substantially improves meaning retention while reducing the likelihood of ideological distortion, thus fulfilling the study's aim of formulating dependable and accurate translation guidelines. The study identifies deficiencies in translator training, especially for pragmatic and contextual adaptation for texts characterized by complex structures and nuanced agency. The findings validate that culturally informed translation, directed by specialized expertise, enhances accuracy while preserving meaning, constituting a significant contribution to literature that has predominantly concentrated on legal or literary translation.

The findings underscore the necessity of specialized training programs, consistent glossaries, and translation standards to reduce hazards linked to cultural and ideological misinterpretation in security documents. The study theoretically illustrates how Critical Discourse Analysis can reveal underlying power and ideological frameworks in language, enhancing our comprehension of the relationship between language, authority, and security environments.

This research presents a cohesive framework connecting language precision, cultural awareness, and pragmatic adjustment. It provides essential recommendations for practitioners, scholars, and policymakers in multilingual security environments, establishing a foundation for more accurate, culturally sensitive, and ideologically informed translation procedures moving forward.

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