

The Role of Dictionaries in Translation Performance: A Case of English to Persian Translation

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Abstract: This study tries to see if the application of dictionaries in translation tasks can improve the quality of translation. In order to reach the purpose, this study investigates the issue both quantitatively and qualitatively in two phases. In the opening phase of the project a questionnaire was given to 230 Iranian translators in seven Iranian state universities to investigate the type of monolingual dictionaries they use while translating informative texts like news reports. In the main phase of the study, three groups of translators with different types of dictionaries- hardcover, computer software, and mobile dictionaries- were selected and given the task of translating three news texts from English to Persian, and their translations were assessed in terms of the accuracy of the words and expressions of the source text and the speed of the job. Results indicated that translators using mobile dictionaries rendered the texts more accurately and much faster than the other two groups. Translators using computer software occupied the second rank, and hardcover dictionary users, bringing up the rear, were the last group to finish the job. This study shows how mobile dictionaries can provide help that meets the needs of translators when translating informative texts.

Keywords: Mobile dictionary, Translation, Accuracy, Speed, Informative Texts

1. Introduction

Since the emergence of Translation Studies as an independent field of study, translation aids also gained special momentum in the scholarly circles of translation. Among all types of translation tools, dictionaries were always prominent and very common to translators. Dictionary types vary from hardcover versions to computer softwares, online dictionaries, etc.

Although dictionaries have proved themselves quite practical in language teaching and learning, few studies have been done in this area and the use of dictionaries has drawn relatively little attention in the field of L2 acquisition (Scholfield, 1997). This problem is much more salient in the field of translation. The studies are not only few in number but also thematically limited. A small body investigated learners' general patterns of dictionary use through a survey (Baxter, 1980; Bejoint, 1981; Tomaszczyk, 1979) which is, somewhat, uncommon in the field of translation. In recent years more efforts have been made to shed light on the use of dictionaries in language learning and translation. Pastor and Alcina (2007) diverted attentions into the application of electronic dictionaries, mainly for the purpose of translation. They elaborated on techniques through which translators could search efficiently in the electronic dictionaries. L'Homme (2010), specifically, highlighted the role of specialized dictionaries for language learners and suggested strategies to designing terminological dictionaries. Nielsen (2010) focused on the role of

dictionaries in translation ability of language learners. It was not until recently that thanks to the extensive development in mobile phone industry, mobile dictionaries came up the stage.

These dictionaries which are software in mobile phones soon became available to many language learners. Their advantages in size and search speed made them highly popular among language users as well as translators. Famous dictionaries like Merriam Webster, Oxford, Cambridge, Longman, Collins and many more that in their hardcover size could weigh a tone, were all available in their pockets, in their mobile phones.

The application of mobile dictionaries in translation seems to be much common and more complicated than that of vocabulary learning, yet not much research has been carried out to show the extent at which this particular type of dictionaries can provide help and facilitation. This study tries to elaborate more on the capacity and applicability of mobile dictionaries, and examines their merits in comparison with other types of dictionaries in translation tasks.

2. Methodology

In the **first phase** of the project, 230 Iranian translators from seven Iranian state universities with different levels of experience were given a questionnaire to tell the type of dictionaries they use while translating informative texts. This phase was conducted to give a general view over the use of dictionaries, specifically mobile dictionaries, among Iranian translators. In the **second (main) phase** of the study, 15 professional translators were chosen randomly to render three news texts as fast and as accurate as possible. They were divided into three groups: in the first group there were 5 translators who used hardcover dictionaries while doing translation work. The second group consisted of 5 translators who used computer software dictionaries. And the last group consisted of 5 translators who used mobile dictionaries while translating. All of these translators were BA graduates of Translation Studies and MA students of Translation Studies with 3-5 years of professional experience who were cooperating at least with one of the translation agencies of Iran.

The second or main phase of the study was carried out in **three** stages; test development, a translation task, and an interview with the translators.

2.1 The Development of the Test

Three experienced translators other than our main participants were asked to translate the text. The aim was to detect the challenging elements in the text. Results showed that some words, expressions, and concepts were challenging for the translators. These challenging points were underlined in the above text and were then the focus of the translation evaluation.

2.2 Translation Task

In the main phase of the study, three groups of translators-each using a particular type of dictionary-were given a task of translation. They were asked to translate the texts as fast as possible. They were allowed to use and bring as many dictionaries as they deem necessary, yet they should have been in one of the aforementioned categories of hardcover, computer software or mobile dictionaries. Their translations were analyzed in terms of speed and accuracy of translating the challenging words and expressions.

Since many translation projects in today`s world are concerned about the latest news of the world, the researchers decided to assign the translators with informative texts. The texts to be translated were 3 short news paragraphs concerning political and economical issues which contained some cultural elements, idioms or expressions, acronyms, etc. The materials have been selected randomly from *swampland.time.com*, a major American news website.

2.3 Interview

The final stage of the main phase of the study was an interview with the translators to see to what extent dictionaries were helpful to them. After they had finished the translation task, the participants were asked a few questions. The purpose was to know more about the application of dictionaries by the translators. Questions were designed using consultation of experts and were as follows:

Question 1: How long have you been using this particular type of dictionary?

Question 2: How many of the underlined items you did know without getting help from your dictionaries?

Question 3: Has it ever occurred to you that you do not want to look up a word or expression, and make a guess, because of difficulties of searching them?

Question 4: How many dictionaries were at your disposal while translating the text?

Research Questions

- 1- What type of dictionaries do Iranian translators use while translating informative texts?
- 2- What groups of dictionary users, among hardcover, computer software or mobile users, can translate faster and more accurate the informative texts?
- 3- Is there any advantage in using mobile dictionaries in comparison with other types of dictionaries?

3. Data Analysis

In the first phase, the data collected from the questionnaire was categorized into three types of dictionary users and the percentages of each type of were given. In the second phase, translation performance of each group was assessed and on the basis of their performance, the obtained data was evaluated.

4. Results of the Survey (The First Phase of the Study)

In the first phase of the project (figure 1), our survey that was conducted with the cooperation of 230 Iranian translators indicated that 132 translators (57.3%) used hardcover dictionaries, 63 translators (27.3%) computer software dictionaries, 25 translators (10.8%) mentioned mobile dictionaries, and 10 translators (4.3%) chose other types of dictionaries like hardware talking dictionaries or online dictionaries.

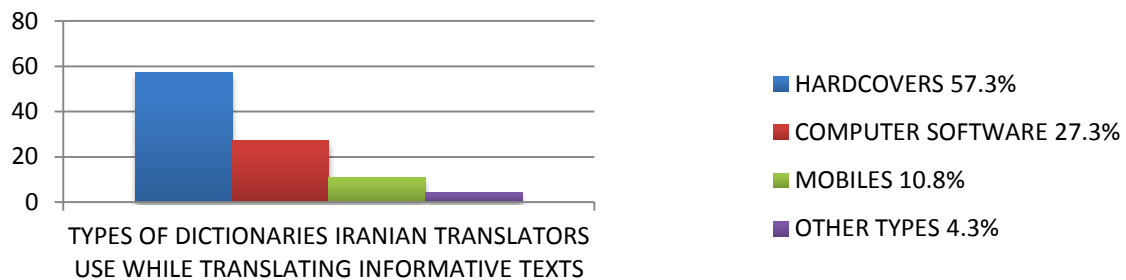


Figure 1.

Interestingly, this survey (see table 1) showed that there is a positive relation between the use of hardcover dictionaries and the experience of the translators. Results showed that 119 translators out of 132 (~ 90%) who used hardcover dictionaries had more than 10 years experience and 13 translators (~10%) had the experience between 5-10 years. On the other hand, for the case of computer software dictionaries, we realized that only 17 translators had the experience of more than 10 years, 21 of them had some experience between 5-10 years and 25 translators had less than 5 years experience.

Experience of translators can be significant if we notice that *none* of the translators who used mobile dictionaries for their translation works had more than 10 years experience. 18 of them had 1-5 years experience and 7 translators had 5-10 years experience.

Table 1. The relationship between the use of different types of dictionaries and the experience of translators

Type of Dictionary	Number and Percentage of Translators	Experience
Hardcover D.	▪ 119/132 (~ 90%)	▪ More than 10 years
	▪ 13/132 (~ 10%)	▪ Between 5-10 years
Computer Software D.	▪ 25/63 (~ 39%)	▪ 1-5 years
	▪ 21/63 (~ 33%)	▪ 5-10 years
	▪ 17/63 (~26%)	▪ More than 10 years
Mobile D.	▪ 18/25 (~ 72%)	▪ 1-5 years
	▪ 7/25 (~ 28%)	▪ 5-10 years

5. Discussion of the Survey (The First Phase of the Study)

This survey tried to show what types of dictionaries Iranian translators mostly use while translating texts, specifically informative texts. Results portrayed some positive relationship between the experience of the translators and the types of dictionaries they use, indicating that the more experienced the translators the more tendency they have towards the more established types of dictionaries. It also demonstrated that less experienced translators, who were the younger generations of translators, had inclinations toward mobile dictionaries for their translation works. Our findings were consistent to Kobayash's study (2005) that was conducted with young Japanese students in which majority of them used electronic dictionaries compared to printed types of dictionaries.

6. Introduction to the Second Phase of the Study

In the main phase of the study, there were three five-member groups each using a particular type of dictionary. The first group used hardcover dictionaries, members of the second group used computer software dictionaries, and the third group consisted of five translators with mobile dictionaries. Each group was tested separately. They were given the text and were asked to translate it as fast and as accurate as possible. The time limit was 60 minutes at the maximum and they were allowed to bring and use as many dictionaries as they need. Translations were analyzed in two aspects; first, speed of the translation process and second, accuracy of the translated expressions and concepts.

7. Results of the Second Phase of the Study

As mentioned above, each group was tested separately. In order to provide a natural and comfortable situation for translators similar to what they had when translating in real life, the researchers decided to go to translators' offices for the case of hardcover dictionary users. This would give them the opportunity to have all their dictionaries without bothering to take them somewhere else. However, since the problem of transferring and moving dictionaries was not problematic for the other two groups, they were tested separately in a classroom environment with their laptop computers and mobile phones at their disposal. As soon as each translator of each group finished their translation task, their finishing time was checked by a stop watch.

7.1 Speed of the Translation Work

Results (See table 2) indicated that the average finishing time of the first group, hardcover users, was 38':13". The average finishing time of the second group, computer software users, was 33':21". And the average finishing time of the third group, mobile users, was 27':54".

Table 2. The average finishing time of each group

Group 1 (Hardcover D. Users)	Average Time
T1= 34:34	38:13
T2= 36:12	
T3= 37:18	
T4= 38:16	
T5= 39:53	
Group 2 (Computer D. Users)	Average Time
T1= 29:34	33:21
T2= 31:19	
T3= 32:09	
T4= 34:06	
T5= 34:13	
Group 3 (Mobile D. Users)	Average Time
T1= 24:40	27:54
T2= 24:57	
T3= 25:39	
T4= 27:02	
T5= 28:36	

7.2 Accuracy of Translation

Evaluation of the accuracy of the expressions and concepts of the text was done basically on the basis of error-free rendition of the target expressions and concepts. Errors in this study were defined as those mistranslations which seriously impaired the transference of meaning. An important point that needs to be mentioned is that other translation quality criteria such as naturalness and the like were not the focus of analysis in the translation assessment and analysis of the present study. The conveyance of the meaning of the specific pre-determined expressions and concepts was the yardstick in our evaluation. To ensure the reliability of the evaluation of the translations, two raters who were professional translators cooperatively analyzed and scored the translations according to our pre-defined criterion.

Results (See table 3) exhibited that the average number of errors committed by the members of the first group, hardcover users, was **7.4**. The average number of errors committed by the members of the second group, computer software users, was, however; **6.2**. And the average number of errors committed by the members of the third group, mobile users, was **4.4**. Interestingly, all errors committed were, as expected, among the challenging elements once detected in the first stage of the study.

Table 3. The average number of errors committed by each group

Group 1 (Hardcover D. Users)	Average Number of Errors
T1= 6 errors	7.4
T2= 6 errors	
T3= 8 errors	
T4= 8 errors	
T5= 9 errors	
Group 2 (Computer D. Users)	Average Number of Errors
T1= 5 errors	6.2
T2= 5 errors	
T3= 6 errors	
T4= 7 errors	
T5= 8 errors	
Group 3 (Mobile D. Users)	Average Number of Errors
T1= 2 errors	4.4
T2= 4 errors	
T3= 4 errors	
T4= 6 errors	
T5= 6 errors	

8. Discussion

Findings showed that users of mobile dictionaries translated the text faster than the two other groups with the average finishing time of 27 minutes and 54 seconds. Computer software dictionary users were the second group that finished their translation task with the average finishing time of thirty three minutes and twenty one seconds. Hardcover dictionary users were the last group who finished the task with the average time of thirty eight minutes and twenty one seconds. This study showed that those who used mobile dictionaries translated the text faster than the other groups. On the other hand, those who used hardcover dictionaries were the last group to finish their translations. Furthermore, findings showed that mobile dictionary users had better performance in translating the challenging words of the text. Results showed that the average number of errors of mobile users was 4.4, while the average number of errors computer software dictionary users` performance was 6.2. This number was 7.4 in hardcover dictionary users. Our findings indicated that the performance of mobile dictionary users was better than other groups in terms of translating the challenging words of the text. This is perhaps due to the fact that mobile dictionary users had many more dictionaries at their disposal compared to other groups which is a great advantage for mobile dictionary users. This was consistent to Kobayashi`s study (2005) that demonstrated new types of reference materials like electronic dictionaries can enhance learning and language performance.

9. Interview

After they had finished the translation task, the participants were asked to answer the interview questions in written forms. Their answers were analyzed by the researchers as follows:

Q1-Analysis: Participants` responses showed that translators of Group 1 and Group 2 had averagely ~4 years experience of working with their particular types of dictionaries. And members of Group 3 had averagely ~3 years experience. These amounts of experience show that they were not novice in their work with those types of dictionaries.

Q2-Analysis: Responses also showed that only 2 of the underlined words [letter & regulatory] were known to all 15 translators. And 3 participants [two from Group1 & 1 from Group2] knew the contextual meaning of the word `House` without getting help from the dictionaries. Answers showed that a good number of words and expressions were not familiar to the participants. Hence, they needed to use their dictionaries in the experiments.

Q3-Analysis: In Group1, 4 of 5 answered YES to this question. In Group2, 1 of 5 answered YES. Finally, In Group3, too, 1 of 5 answered YES to this question. Responses show that Hardcover Dictionary Users have high tendency towards trying to guess the meanings of words or expressions or even leaving them aside rather than troubling themselves to checking them all.

Q4-Analysis: Responses to the question, regarding the number of dictionaries each translators had, were as follows. In group 1, the average number of dictionaries was ~5 (Minimum No.3 / Maximum No.7). In Group 2, the average number of dictionaries was ~8 (Minimum No.6 / Maximum No.10). In Group 3, the average number of dictionaries was ~19 (Minimum No.12 / Maximum No.31). Answers to this question showed that Mobile Dictionary Users had extensive source of dictionaries in comparison with two other groups.

10. Conclusion

The survey that was conducted in Iranian state universities showed that 57.3% of Iranian translators used hardcover dictionaries while translating informative texts, 27.3% of translators used computer

software dictionaries, 10.8% used mobile dictionaries, and the remaining 4.3% used other types of dictionaries for their translation works. The survey results showed that there was a positive relationship between the experience of translators and the types of dictionaries they used. The more experienced the translators had, the more tendencies they had towards the hardcover types of dictionaries, and younger generations of translators had inclinations toward computer software or mobile dictionaries for their translation works.

The present research showed that in a comparison among three groups of translators (Hardcover Dictionary Users, Computer Software Users, and Mobile Dictionary Users) mobile dictionary users were the fastest group to finish their translation task; on the other hand, hardcover dictionary users were the last group to finish the job with significant margin. In terms of accuracy, too, our findings showed that hardcover users committed more errors than the other two groups, and mobile users were the group who made fewer errors than the other two groups.

The interview phase of this research also showed that almost all translators had enough experience in the use of their dictionary types and most of the words and expressions were not known by the translators before the translation task, hence they were in need of using their dictionaries. Interview feedback showed that hardcover dictionary users were susceptible to getting tired of looking up the dictionary which usually leads them to leaving the vocabulary search or merely guessing them. Quantitatively speaking, translators' responses showed that mobile dictionary users had many more dictionaries at their disposal in comparison with the other two types that naturally would provide them much more liberty and much extensive resources to searching the items they seek, specifically for the case of idioms and encyclopedic information. This study showed that mobile dictionaries, contrary to the expectations, had potentials to be practical for the translation of informative texts where the focus is on the accuracy of meanings. This study also showed that mobile dictionaries are important in terms of the swiftness of the translation process. This factor is highly valuable for translation agencies that are usually in challenging needs for servicing their clients with correct and fast translations.

10.1 Limitations of the Study

One of the major limitations of this study was the number of translators who participated in this study. It would be better if we could run this examination with a larger number of translators (at least 15 translators) in each group to be able to generalize the results of this study.

10.2 Suggestions for Further Studies

The effectiveness of various translation tools can always call for further investigations. The impact of different dictionaries on translation performance will result in informative feedback which can be highly helpful for the translators. Different dictionaries and text types can be considered as variables for further research projects. For instance the application of online dictionaries can be investigated in the translation of scientific papers. These practical studies can pave the way for better real-life translations.

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Appendix

The texts were randomly selected from *Swapland.Time.Com* and were given to the translators. The challenging items are underlined.

House Primary Upset in Ohio: Signs of a Weak GOP Majority?

Imagine how crazy it would be if Michele Bachmann lost her House seat to a Tea Partyer even more conservative than she was—that's the equivalent of what happened on Tuesday when three-term Rep. Jean Schmidt lost the Republican primary in Ohio's 2nd District to political rookie Brad Wenstrup. The upset was big—just last cycle, Schmitt won her primary by a whopping 40%. She lost this time by 6%.

Occupy the Regulatory Open Comment Period!

There's nothing "wrong" with protests built around placard-hoisting and park-squatting, but Occupy the SEC is definitely doing something right with its radically different tack. The Occupy Wall Street-offshoot has submitted a 325-page letter to federal financial regulatory agencies on the Volcker Rule, a controversial measure designed to prohibit banks from proprietary trading, or making investments with their own dollars rather than their customers', that was passed as part of the Dodd-Frank financial reform law.

Why Obama's 'All of the Above' Energy Policy Won't Ease Pain at the Pump

I have a brilliant idea that will solve the nation's energy problem. We need to invest in a massive research program—I mean Apollo Project-sized—to invent a silver bullet. Because all I keep hearing is that we're all waiting for a silver bullet to solve our energy woes, if only we could find one. Well, the American people aren't stupid. They know that's not a plan, especially since we're already drilling. That's a bumper sticker. It's not a strategy to solve our energy challenge.