

## **Translation Quality Assessment of English Equivalents of Persian Proper Nouns: A case of bilingual tourist signposts in Isfahan**

Zahra Moeini Fard, MSc, Islamic Azad University, Isfahan Branch, Isfahan, Iran

*zahramoeinifard@yahoo.com*

Hossein Heidari Tabrizi,

Assistant Professor, Islamic Azad University, Isfahan Branch

*heidaritabrizi@gmail.com*

Azizeh Chalak,

Assistant Professor, Islamic Azad University, Isfahan Branch

*azichalak@gmail.com*

### **Abstract**

This study evaluated the translation quality of English equivalents of Persian proper nouns in the tourist signs and bilingual boards in Isfahan. To find different errors in the translations of the bilingual boards and tourist signs, the data were collected directly by taking picture or writing exactly from the available tourist signs and bilingual boards. Then, the errors were assessed by Multilingual eLearning in Language Engineerin (MeLLANGE) translation error typology, a model for evaluating and marking the errors of a project by Leonardo da Vinci center of education and culture in the University of Paris. The findings revealed that the most frequent errors in Persian-English translation were related to errors of incorrect cases in full upper cases, errors of transferring the content by source language intrusion in the un-translated translatable cases and errors related to the syntax of language. As a conclusion, using expert and knowledgeable translators, applying a consistent method, and employing a comprehensive and standard system can be effective to reduce such errors.

**Keywords:** Bilingual boards, MeLLANGE translation error typology, tourist signs, Translation quality assessment

### **Introduction**

The present time is called the age of communication and technology. All of the countries need to communicate with each other; this relationship is requisite for political, economic, cultural and social goals. The tourism industry can include one part of the cultural and economic goals of knowing and using English language. By increasing day by day of tourism industry, the necessity of knowing and using the English language well and perfectly as an instrument of universal and international relationship, becomes prominent. When a tourist visits a country, s/he encounters different cases such as the names, tourist signs and titles of boards and signposts that exist in cities, now assume that the names and titles have not been written in the correct way and there have been different types of errors and mistranslations in their writing. This study assesses the quality of translation from Persian to English in the bilingual boards, signposts and tourist signs and finds different types of errors and the causes of those errors by MeLLANGE Translation Error Typology and attempts to investigate the quality of English equivalents of bilingual tourists' signposts in Isfahan and also to find out in which categories of the MeLLANGE Translation Error Typology, do the errors found in English translation of such signposts fall?

## Literature Review

### Translation and Tourism

In the topic of translation of tourism texts the issue of language becomes prominent and the importance of proper translation for this purpose becomes highlight. "Tourism uses language to manipulate reality turning an anonymous place into a tourist destination; therefore, language is the most powerful driving force in the field of tourism" (Delforouz, 2010, p. 34)

In translation of a text there are different types of effects that maybe occur during the process of translation, which influence on the quality of a perfect rendition. Merkaj (2013) declared: There are at least five kinds of influences that need to be considered when translating tourist texts from SL to TL, and they are: (a) the influence of associative and connotative meanings, (b) the influence of different understandings and thoughts, (c) the influence of metaphors and expressions, (d) the influence of religions and myths, and (e) the influence of values and lifestyle. (P.4) Muñoz (2011) introduced tourist translations as a mediation tool and highlighted the importance of acceptable translations of tourist texts and its numerous difficulties; also he expressed the necessity of training and professionalism of translators in this field as a specialized language in which cultural and linguistic mediation in a high degree is present continuously.

### Translation and Error

There are numerous models and different classifications for translation errors, from so general divisions to so specific types. One of the general types which was not technical and described simply the most elemental forms of errors by Pym (1992) are: binary and non-binary errors, which in binary errors there are just right and wrong answers and non-binary ones that there are at least two correct answers and then the incorrect ones. Errors can occur in numerous levels such as culture, language, pragmatic and other levels and by different causes; for instance: "lack of comprehension, inappropriateness to readership, misuse of time" (Pym, 1992, p.4). Baker (2001) pointed that Errors in translation generally come from the non-equivalence among the source and target languages. Therefore in assessing the quality of translation of texts considering to the mentioned cases are inevitable. Alaeeny (2008) enumerated different types of errors of translators in a way that can say it is almost a comprehensive description; such as the ability and science of translators about translation or competence errors that include: lexical errors because of do not knowing the terminology errors of specialty fields, the structure of compound words, false friends, the meaning range of equivalents and also do not knowing the rate of natural equivalents, English grammar and sentence structure and not distinguishing proverbs and idioms of ordinary sentences. She also named the cultural errors, collocation, extra linguistic and approach errors from this category.

Another type of error that Alaeeny (2008) cited in her article is pragmatic errors that are divided into the following groups with its various subsidiaries such as: (a) approach, (b) method, (c) reader-oriented errors, (d) communicative errors, (e) meaning-based errors and (f) performance. These functional errors are associated with critical conditions such as stress, fatigue, noise, heat and light of workplace, physical illnesses and work related stressors. Visual errors, auditory errors, errors of confidence, errors arising from the production, errors resulting from the lack of interest in translation and errors resulting from time constraints are also another various kind of errors.

### **Translation Quality Assessment (TQA)**

In spite of a lot of national and international translation standards about TQA, there is no an objective criteria which is accepted generally for evaluating the quality of translations. As Williams (2009) believed TQA cannot be values-free and for being useful it is based on criteria of goodness, and by passing the test of validity and reliability he tried to design TQA models objective as much as possible.

There are lots of different models of translation quality assessment (TQA), the MeLLANGE translation error typology is one of them that in this study has been used for evaluating the quality of translations.

### **MeLLANGE project**

The MeLLANGE (Multilingual eLearning in Language Engineering) project by Leonardo da Vinci center of education and culture in university of Paris is a manual annotation of errors for Learner Translator Corpus or LTC. It is a hierarchical scheme that covers the issues of syntax, terminology, register and style. The MeLLANGE translation error typology has divided the errors into two main groups: content transfer related errors and language related errors. These two fundamental categories are divided into several subcategories and also more specific error types for every one of them. The error types are marked by an abbreviation code (for instance: TR-OM means translation omission &...) that attributes to incorrect words, phrases or sentences during the annotation process of translated text. The purpose of this matrix is helping to mark or to give feedback to students' translation and also knowing and achieving data and information about frequent errors, for further studies. In the website of MeLLANGE project three most frequent errors in LTC by TL has displayed: language incorrect terminology and lexis (LA-TL-IN), distortion of the original content (TR-DI), and language inconsistent terminology and lexis within the target text (LA-TL-IT). The target languages of the project of these overall three most frequent errors were: ca, de, en, sp, fr, and it.

In a study by Castagnoli et al. (2011) 10 most frequent errors in the MeLLANGE LTC has presented : Incorrect Terminology and Lexis in Language (LA-TL-IN), Distortion in Content Transfer (TR-DI), Too literal in SL Intrusion of Content Transfer (TR-SI-TL), Awkward Style in Language (LA-ST-AW), Omission in Content Transfer (TR-OM), Tense/Aspect in Inflection and Agreement of Language (LA-IA-TA), Punctuation in Hygiene of Language (LA-HY-PU), Term Translated by Non-Term in Terminology and Lexis of Language (LA-TL-NT), Number in Inflection and Agreement of Language (LA-IA-NU), Inconsistent within TT in Terminology and Lexis of Language (LA-TL-IT).

The advantages of MeLLANGE error annotation matrix is that, it is an objective, new and update model, it has revised twice after annotation tests. The end of this classification, in each part of error types is open (*user-defined* category), it means that if there is a new type of error or a kind of error in the translated text that is not mentioned before, can add to this categorization and has been explained. In addition in this matrix the rater can score to different errors and grade each category of errors according to different texts and the importance of each category in the text and distinct the gravity and weight of seriousness of errors according to the text type.

### **Methodology**

#### **Raters**

The researchers in this study as the raters collected the data for evaluation and interpretation. Moreover, for analyzing the data two researchers with PhD. degrees and one researcher with M.A. degree in translation studies assessed the data as the intra- and inter-

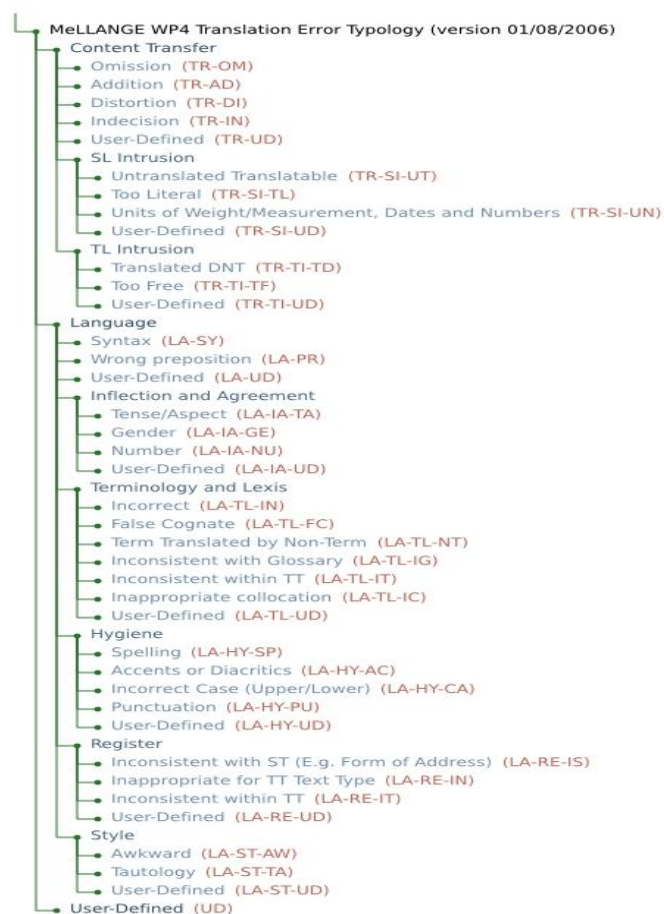
raters. Also, since the access to a native one was not possible, for evaluating the errors the researchers got help from an Iranian citizen in United States who has lived there for 37 years. This research was not an experimental type, but a descriptive and qualitative one; therefore, there were no participants and any intervention.

### Materials

The materials of this study consisted of 200 items of bilingual signposts and the brown tourist signs of Isfahan including 300 phrases or names of places and directions. The sampling of these cases was non-randomly done--convenience sampling. These samples were gathered by the researchers directly by observing the cases and registering them exactly in the same written form as they appeared on the boards, and through taking pictures. Then, they were categorized and filed for evaluating and explaining the errors. Thus, the signposts and tourist brown signs were the materials evaluated in two main areas according to MeLLANGE translation error typology. The major parts were errors related to transferring the content of the texts and errors related to syntax, terminology, register, style and so on. The material, i.e. the bilingual signposts and tourist boards, were more in the form of one or several words or a phrase or a small sentence, not in the form of long sentences or paragraphs.

### Framework and Instrument

The instrument of this study was the theoretical framework of the MeLLANGE translation error typology of Leonardo da Vinci project, used for categorizing and evaluating the frequency and the percentage of the errors. There are two versions of MeLLANGE translation error matrix: 2006 version and the version with little changes--Leeds University version. In this study, the second version was used.



**Figure1.** MeLLANGE Translation Error Typology (Retrieved March 17, 2015, from <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/cts/research/publications/leeds-cts-2005-03-secara>)

The tools for collecting the data were observation sheet and a camera that caused the process of data-gathering go easier, faster, more convenient and more accurate. For evaluating the data by different levels of MeLLANGE matrix, two tables according to two major categories of MeLLANGE matrix were designed, i.e. table of language errors and table of content transfer errors which show the evaluated subcategories of the errors in more details.

### Procedure

The needed data were collected directly by in situ observation and taking pictures. The signposts and boards of directions and their English equivalents, most of them existing near and in the corner of intersections and the city main squares, were copied or pictured. These processes were done in a period of two months. Then, the data were categorized in a logical way, filed and were divided into two basic dimensions with their subcategories according to MeLLANGE translation error typology to assess them in a more understandable and more accessible way. The analysis of the data was that of content analysis, based on MeLLANGE translation error typology. Actually, the errors were classified separately in two major groups of language and content. Then, they were evaluated according to each level of MeLLANGE typology and its sub-categories. For more precision and accuracy, analyzing of the data was assessed by inter- and intra-raters.

## Results

### Results of Errors Related to Content Transfer

In Table 1 the frequency and percentage of errors related to content transfer are shown. As it is clear, the percentage of intrusion in the source language, in un-translated translatable cases, was the highest in the group of errors which was recognized as the transferring the content of the text.

**Table 1.** Errors Related to Content Transfer

Content Transfer		Frequency	Percentage
Omission		3	1
Addition		0	-
Distortion		7	2.33
Indecision		0	-
SL Intrusion	Untranslated translatable	27	9
	Too literal	0	-
	Units of Weight/Measurement, Dates and Numbers	0	-
TL Intrusion	Translated DNT	0	-
	Too Free	0	-

### Results of Errors Related to Language

In the evaluation of the 300 signposts, 110 cases related to language related errors of MeLLANGE typology. 23 items of these 110 errors were related to Language set in the syntax subcategory of language errors. An example of errors connected to syntax of language

was the *praying room* or *pray room* for the *prayer room* that was used frequently. Just 5 cases among all cases included the correct form, *prayer room*.

There were 14 items of language errors in syntax level, which had not been observed the rules of the target language concerning nouns and adjectives; actually they had translated according to Persian rules, i.e. nouns had been located before (e.g., Mosque Almahdi instead of Almahdi Mosque, *Park Behesht* instead of *Behesht Park*). There was no abbreviation form for the word mosque; nevertheless, there were various types of errors in writing the abbreviation form such as *Mosq.*; *Msq.*; *Msq.*; *MQ.* etc. Therefore, such errors can be placed in the subcategory of inconsistent errors within TT, or according to different and frequent error cases of abbreviation may be regarded as a new level related to language and named wrong abbreviations.

There were also some errors of terminology and lexis such as inappropriate collocation and incorrect forms. A label can be given to these errors which include the cases such as cross road and junction that has been used frequently for the intersections, either in complete form or in abbreviation form; they can be named the level of the errors not common in TL.

In observing and collecting the data for this research there were different types of full upper cases in bilingual boards and signposts such as *MOSQUE BABOLRAHMEH*, *MOSQUE-AGHANOOR*, *MOSQUE ALMAHDI*, *EMAM KHOMEINI (RH) SQ.*, *CHEHELSTUN MUSEUM*, *AFARINESH MRKT Alley, B.*, *AHANGARHA Alley, 2<sup>nd</sup> ST BLIND ALLEY*, *FERDOSI BRG.*, *SH A GHODOSI AVE.*, *TOURISM HOUSE* and *TOURISM INFORMATION OFFICE*, *SHEYKH LOTF ALLAH MQ*, and so on. These full upper cases have probably been used for respecting some significant places such as mosques and religious places, but in some cases they were used also for unimportant places and even small dead ends and blind alleys. Using full upper case for respecting and giving more importance to religious places of Iranians and Muslims is not however acceptable in the tourist's bilingual boards, because the full upper cases have some kind of imposition of higher to the lower religion believes and, therefore, causes misunderstanding and a kind of imposition of beliefs on visitors and tourists.

Other types of errors that can be mentioned were the misspelt terms specially substitutions in errors related to language hygiene; for instance, using *Emam* instead of *Imam*, *Sg.* for *Sq.* and *Mousoleum* instead of *Mausoleum*. There were errors of register such as inappropriate forms for target text type. For instance, the *municipality graveyard* has been written for the municipal cemetery without any attention to the inappropriate meaning of graveyard, apart from using *municipality* itself instead of *municipal*.

Awkward style in cases such as: *TO THE BOARDING THE AIRPLANE*, full upper cases that causes an awkward style in English language. The concept word *Boarding* is in itself comprehensible and there is no need for more explanation. The cases such as this were seen abundantly in Persian-to-English translations.

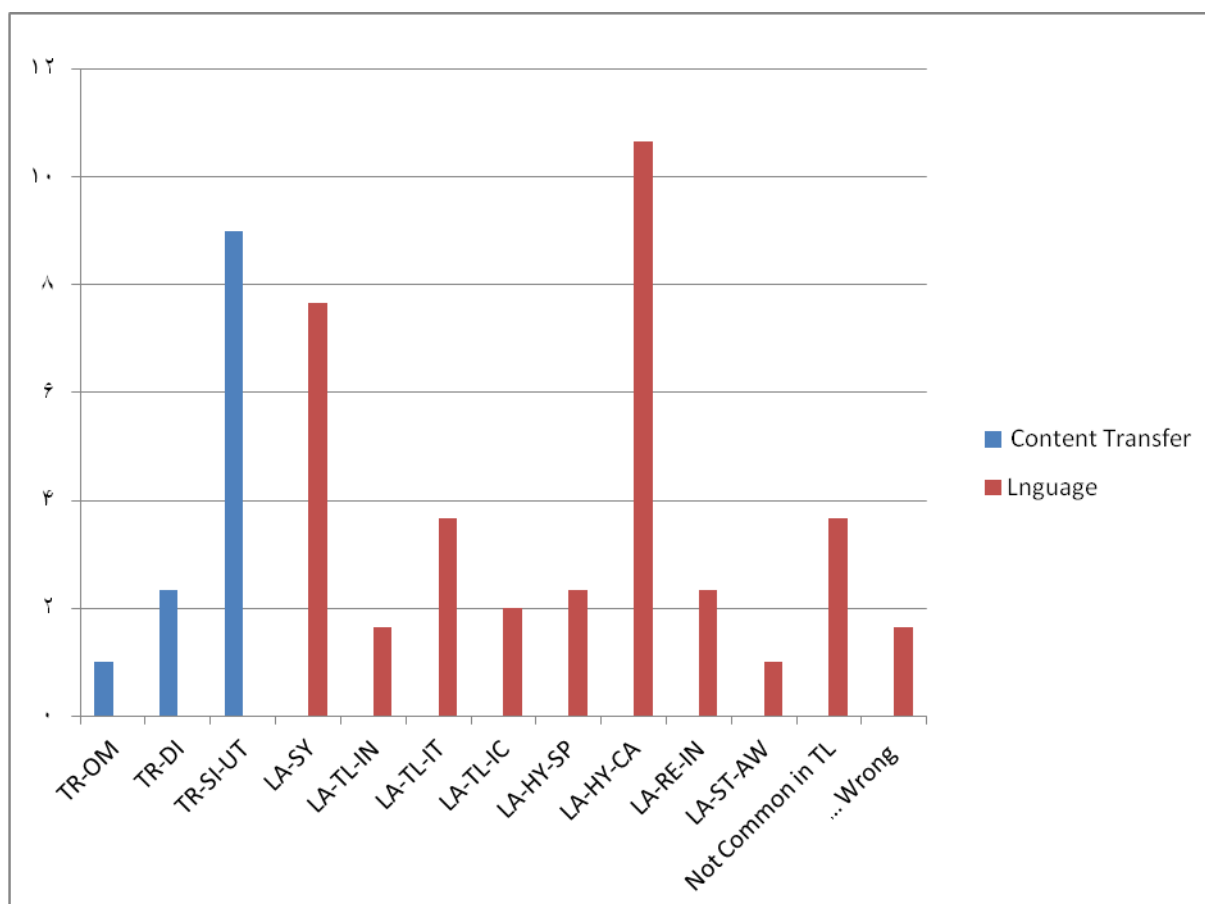
In table 2 below, the results of errors related to language has been displayed. As can be seen, the rate of errors in the level of hygiene in language had the highest frequency, showing lack of attention to the incorrect use of full uppercases. The errors of syntax concerning noun and adjective and not observing the rule of noun and its modifier in English language have taken the second place in the chart.

Table 2, Errors Related to Language

Language		Frequency	Percentage
Syntax		23	7.66
Wrong Preposition		0	-
Inflection and Agreement	Tense/Aspect	0	-
	Gender	0	-
	Number	0	-

Terminology and Lexis	Incorrect	5	1.66
	False cognate	0	-
	Term Translated by Non-Term	0	-
	Inconsistent with Glossary	0	-
	Inconsistent within TT	11	3.66
	Inappropriate Collocation	6	2
Hygiene	Spelling/Misspelt Term	7	2.33
	Accents or Diacritics	0	-
	Incorrect Case (upper/lower)	32	10.66
	Punctuation	0	-
Register	Inconsistent with ST	0	-
	Inappropriate for TT Text Type	7	2.33
	Inconsistent within TT	0	-
Style	Awkward	3	1
	Fluency/TL Expression	0	-
	Tautology	0	-
User-Defined			
(Not Common in TL)		11	3.66
(Wrong Abbreviation)		5	1.66

As it is clear in the table of errors and the rate of obtained results, from assessing the 300 tourist signs and bilingual boards, 147cases or about half of them have errors related to transferring the content of the text, with some of them being language-related errors. Figure 2 below clearly shows the frequency of all the errors:



**Figure 2,** The most frequent errors of tourist signs and bilingual boards

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

In this study 300 cases of bilingual boards and tourist signs were assessed. The boards evaluated were the signposts and tourist signs of directions which show just the names of places and streets. In small text units, i.e. words and phrases, not clauses, whole sentences, paragraphs or complete texts. Therefore, according to the classification of MeLLANGE matrix, the errors were more related to the language than to the content transfer.

In the process of collecting the data, there were tourist signs in brown tableaus that just had been written in Persian and they were not bilingual boards with English translation. These cases caused the percentage of un-translated translatable cases of study increase and included the second case of the most frequent errors in this study. The first case of errors consisted of hygiene incorrect cases with high percentage of full upper cases in the boards.

Another considerable point is that several cases of bilingual tableaus were observed to be so colorless and old that their writing was not distinguishable for the visitors (e.g. some of the boards installed for introducing different parts of Chehelsotoon Palace--one of the most famous and historical palaces of Isfahan). These cases can affect tourism industry and tourist attraction in its international dimension.

Based on the results of 300 cases of bilingual boards, and compared with the results for responding to the first question, it can be concluded that there were some mistakes and errors in the translation of tourist signs and bilingual boards. The quality of translation of the identified cases and their English equivalents required more attention for evaluation. Of course, this research had a glance only at a limited number of signposts and tableaus. An study of more cases can highlight the erroneous quality of bilingual boards further.

The findings of this study are almost in line with the most frequent errors in MeLLANGE LTC by TL according to MeLLANGE corpus site and the frequent errors of LTC in the research that has been done by Castagnoli et al (2006). The three most frequent errors in LTC in the MeLLANGE project were language incorrect terminology, distortion of the original content, and language inconsistent terminology and lexis within the target text, while in the present study, the most frequent errors are LA-HY-CA, and the cause of these errors is the lack of a consistent system for standard translation in different groups who have done the task. The cause of the high range of TR-SI-UT errors was the fact that for some tourist signs there were no English equivalents. The cause of the errors of syntax as the third sort of errors was different ways of using Persian nouns and their different forms of English. This is in line with the results in a study by Castagnoli et al. (2011).

In a study on the evaluation of the quality of English translations of Persian historical tourist catalogues and brochures produced by Iranian non-native translators, according to seven different types of translation category by Ivir (1987), it was shown that addition, omission and substitution were the most frequently-used strategies in translation. This is in line with the findings of the present study.

Finally, this study aimed to identify translation errors in boards, find out the causes of mistranslation of boards and suggest some solutions for avoiding these problems. According to the findings of the study, it can be claimed that the quality of English equivalents of bilingual tourists' signposts in Isfahan are not acceptable. Therefore, the importance of paying more attention to the first cases a visitor faces as soon as coming to a country, i.e. the tourist signs and different boards installed abundantly everywhere in a city such as Isfahan, becomes highlighted. The necessity of a consistent system with a defined pattern for translating public boards and taking advantage of skillful and knowledgeable translators are highly felt. Lastly, this research rings a bell to the students, translators and university faculties that they should care for the above-mentioned errors in every phase of the processes involved in translation.



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