JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE, CULTURE, AND TRANSLATION
www.lct.iaush.ac.ir

Journal of Language, Culture, and Translation (LCT), 3(1) (2015), 82-93

Most and Least Difficult Persian Tense Structure: Mozare in L1-L2/L2-L1 Translation Processes

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DOI: 10.30495/LCT.2015.692315

Received: 30/12/2014 ***Accepted: 14/04/2015***

Abstract

The intrinsic attraction of translation with the aim of discovering and transferring meaning, on the one hand, and the oceanic complexity of language, on the other hand, have added impetus to the momentum of translation studies. One obvious area is the set of ubiquitous concepts realized in given structures. An instance is the Persian (L1) tense structure 'mozare' with five concepts expressed in their corresponding English (L2) structures. Specifically, this study sought to answer how L1-L2/L2-L1 translations of 'mozare' would be done in terms of processing time needed. To answer the above question, 50 English translation (fe)male undergraduates, at Islamic Azad University of Isfahan (Khorasgan) were, first, screened out to 23 on a restricted PBT TOEFL and, then, tested via a test involving both L1-L2 and L2-L1 translations of mozare concepts. Findings indicated that in L2-L1 translation, the translation of simple present into mozare took longest, that is, was most difficult, whereas in L1-L2 translation, the translation of mozare into present perfect took longest, that is, was most difficult. Pedagogically speaking, findings could be used for both language translator and language teacher trainer programs. Moreover, the research could be replicated for other similar high-frequency multiple-concept structures.

Keywords: Mozare; Difficulty concept; Translation; Simple present; Present perfect

1. Introduction

It is generally, according to Catford (1974), agreed that when it comes to contrastive analysis, there is no one-to-one correspondence between any

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two languages, either syntactically or semantically. The argument is heavily debatable. Assuming that semantics, or rather meaning, can be carried across, Chesterman (2005) observes that what remains is how to explain the dissimilarities of the structures across two languages. Put otherwise, the relationship is one-to-many and many-to-one. Furthermore, of the non-correspondences available, some are more frequent than others. For this reason, they should be given priority over others. One such area is the *tense* structure which needs an in-depth analysis if it is to serve a practical purpose. Another matter of concern that considerably bears on the qualitative and quantitative aspects of translation is the *direction* of translation, that is, L1-L2 or L2-L1. Obviously, the former demands a greater degree of proficiency on the part of the translator than does the latter. *Mozare* (*declarative*), according to Hirmandi (1994), a most frequent Persian tense structure translatable into five English tense structures, was the focus of this study.

The reasons behind this choice are that, on the one hand, *mozare* is the one and only tense structure translatable into the largest number of corresponding tense structures across into English, that is, five different tense structures. On the other hand, the structure is the most difficult to learn for the simple fact that it is the structure that leads the language learner or the translator to decide which corresponding L2 structure is most appropriate. Pedagogically, according to Gutt (1991/2000), explicit syntactic and semantic explanations seem to theoretically resolve the issue, especially if they are accompanied by contextual explanations and drills selected from a natural corpus.

It can be concluded that mozare is heavily context-bound for its meaning. That is, Phase 1 of the translation requires the L1-L2 translator to analyze the contextual data to arrive at the meaning. Phase 2 requires the translator to reformulate the meaning into the corresponding L2 tense structure. Obviously, Phase 1 takes a much longer time than Phase 2 to process, making it more difficult for the translator to translate into the L2 structure. Put otherwise, translation of mozare is relatively more difficult (i.e., difficulty/ease is a measure of the time taken to translate both Phases 1 and 2 processes). This should not be taken to mean that Phase 2 is less important than Phase 1.

In this study, the following were then set as the objectives: (1) locating the difficult areas of the corresponding concepts of the L1 tense structure mozare translated into their corresponding English structures,(2) exploring which direction of translation of the L1 structure mozare (i.e., from L1-L2

or from L2-L1) is more difficult, (3) developing and proposing pedagogized remedial explanations and drills in the hope of improving translator training and English teacher training, (4) helping translator trainer and English teacher trainer universities and institutions alike, and (5) offering help to prospective researchers in the field to explore potential variables affecting the difficulty of translation.

Given the context, the L1 mozare can potentially be used to mean any one of the following L2 concepts expressed in their corresponding structures:

- Simple present tense: *John goes to school.*
- Present continuous tense: *John is going to school.*
- Simple future tense: *John is going/will go to school tomorrow.*
- Future continuous tense: *John will be going to school at this hour tomorrow.*
- Present perfect continuous tense: *John has been going to school for ten years.*

To illustrate, given the context, the Persian structure mozare can be used for a variety of concepts which, when translated into English, can take a different length of time. Therefore, the object is to find out which concepts are the most and least difficult to translate into English. Put otherwise, knowing that the Persian mozare, when used in a particular concept, means a different thing and that each concept is translated into their corresponding English structures, which concept takes longest to translate into English. For instance, mozare can be used to refer to a routine which must be translated into its corresponding English simple present tense structure. Alternatively, mozare can also be used to refer to an event ongoing at the moment which must be translated into its corresponding English present continuous tense structure. Now, the question is which translation process takes longer to occur: translating mozare into the English simple present structure or into the English present continuous tense structure. In this study, the concept of "taking the longest time to translate into English" is synonymous with "the most difficult to translate," for the only operational constituent for the concept *difficulty* is the time taken to process the L1 for translation into L2. Given that mozare can potentially carry a number of concepts translatable into their corresponding English tense structures, the goal of this study was to find the time taken to translate each concept; hence,

which is the most and least difficult to translate. Furthermore, which of the five corresponding L2 structures is the most and least difficult to translate form L2 to L1? Finally, which direction of translation is easier to translate for the L1 speaker: from L1 to L2 or from L2 to L1? The implications for both the translator and translator trainer as well as for the language teacher and language teacher trainer alike would be what strategies and drills to develop to facilitate the translation process.

Dehkhoda (1998) defines mozare as made up of the verb stem and inflectional suffixes *m, i, d, im, id,* and *and*. The rule applies to all verbs– be they regular or irregular. Sometimes, the prefix *mi* and, at other times, *be* are added to the verb. Mozare is subdivided into declarative and subjunctive. The former is used to refer to the past, present, future, or a combination of the three, positively reporting a fact, such as *khoram* or *mikhoram, khori*, or *mikhori*. The latter is used to refer to a probable event in future, or express a desire, such as *beravam, beravi, bekhoram*, and so on.

Gharib (1988) defines mozare as meaning "like, becoming" (p.52) and a verb referring to the present or future. It is also the name applied to a particular meter in Persian poetry. Moshiri (1997) defines mozare as a form of verb referring to both the present and the future, for example, *Man be edare miravam*.

Moein (1992) defines mozare as "becoming like, like, a poetic meter very common in Persian" (p. 18, 578) and a verb referring to the present or the future. Mozare is formed by the stem of the verb + ad, as in *sad* + inflectional suffix for pronouns, for example, *ro, ravad, zan, zanad*, and *khor, khorad*. At times, the prefix *mi* is added to mozare (declarative) such as *miravam, miravim, miravi, miravid, miravad*, and *miravand*, and (2) subjunctive, suggesting doubt, desire, and the like, for instance, *beravam, beravim, beravi, beravid, beravad*, and *beravand*.

Apart from psycholinguistic studies where time is used as a measure of linguistic difficulty or ease, there do not seem to be any other studies conducted in this area, except for the one by Dehghani (2014), the implication of which was that it took longer to translate the English simple past and past progressive from Persian into English than from English into

Persian. However, translating the English simple past, meaning a completed action from English into Persian and action in progress from Persian into English, took less time than other concepts.

This study was an attempt to seek answers for the following questions:

1. In L1-L2 translation, translation into which of the above concept structures takes the longest and shortest time to process; hence, the most and least difficult, respectively?
2. In L2-L1 translation, the translation of which L2 concept into the L1 concept structure (i.e., mozare) takes the longest and shortest time to process; hence, the most and least difficult, respectively?
3. Which direction (i.e., L1-L2 or L2-L1) takes a longer or shorter time to process; hence, more or less difficult?

In line with the above questions, the following null hypotheses were formulated:

- H0(1): Assuming that the partcipants' L1 is Persian and their L2 is English, each of the five corresponding concepts of the L1 structure mozare takes as much time to translate into L2 as any other of the five mozare concepts; hence, there is no continuum of difficulty or ease in translating into L2.
- H0(2): Assuming that the participants' L1 is Persian and their L2 is English, each of the five corresponding concepts of the L2 structure takes as much time to translate into L1 as any other of the five mozare concepts; hence, there is no continuum of difficulty or ease in translating into L1 mozare.
- H0(3): Assuming that the participants' L1 is Persian and their L2 is English, either direction of the translation of the five mozare concepts (i.e., from L1-L2 or from L2-L1) takes as much time as the other direction to translate; hence, there is no continuum of difficulty or ease in translating in either direction.

2. Method

2.1. Materials

The participants were initially 50 L2 learners at Islamic Azad University of Isfahan (Khorasgan). They were (fe)male undergraduate juniors majoring in English translation in the summer semester of 2014. From among the 50 learners, 23 were screened out for further investigation upon administration of Test I.

Two tests were administered to the participants: Tests I and II. Test I was a paper-based version of a TOEFL-simulated test of "Structure" and

"Reading and Vocabulary," a total of 100 questions: 40 questions with a timing of 25 min for the "Structure" section and 60 questions with a timing of 45 min for the "Reading and Vocabulary" section, originally prescribed for the test.

Test I was basically intended to ensure that the participants qualified to sit for Test II. As Test I was a standard simulated test, no changes were made to the test. The term *qualified*, as used in this context, means that the student is both grammatically and lexically proficient and capable of textual interpretation. The "Listening" and "Essay Writing" sections were removed for they were irrelevant to the purpose of Test II (i.e., translation).

Test II presupposed a working knowledge of both Persian and English for the translation task comprising two sections: English-Persian and Persian-English with five TL tense structure mozare. It should be added that Test II required knowledge of both Persian and English and a working knowledge of translating from either language into the other: Persian-English and English-Persian. As the participants were juniors majoring in English translation, such knowledge was presupposed.

2.2. Procedure

Concerning the administration procedure, for Test I, the participants were given a package containing 40 multiple-choice questions for the "Structure and Written Expressions" to finish within 25 min, as well as a package containing 60 questions for the "Reading Comprehension and Vocabulary" to finish within 45 min. As a higher degree of proficiency was required for Test II, the passing score for each section was set at 80% of the entire score 100 that is, 32 for the first package and 48 for the second package, a total of 80. On administration of Test I, 23 participants were screened out for Test II. For Test II, the participants were given a package containing two sections each with 5 sentences to translate, a total of 10 sentences. Section I contained five sentences to translate from English to Persian. Section II contained five sentences to translate from Persian to English. The participants were instructed to record the starting and finishing hours for each item provided on only a single sheet of paper so that the time spent on each question could be measured.

For Test II, the participants were briefed to do their best on the translation and to record the time spent to translate each item. The significance as well as the pedagogical implications of their honest and serious reactions on each translation item were explained to the participants.

They were also reminded of the possible practical uses to which the outcome of their work would be put. Furthermore, their questions were patiently answered in detail prior to test administration.

The rationale for Test I was to screen out participants proficient in English "Structure" and "Vocabulary and Reading Comprehension." The rationale for Test II was to find out which of the five concepts of the Persian tense structure mozare was most and least difficult for the Persian speakers to translate: from Persian (=L1) to English (=L2) or from L2 to L1 and generally which was more difficult to translate: from L1-L2 or L2-L1.

For scoring purposes, a correctly translated item was one which was translated properly minimally with focus on the TL tense structure mozare and maximally the entire TL sentence. A violation of the minimum was sufficient to entirely exclude the item from the total score. An item missed or purposely left out for translation was also sufficient to exclude the item from the total score (see Table 1).

Table 1. *Screen Test: PBT TOEFL*

Ss*	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
SWE**	33	32	32	32	35	33	33	35	33	33	34	34
RCV***	48	49	49	49	50	52	51	50	53	51	50	48
Total	81	81	81	81	85	85	84	85	86	84	84	82

Ss*	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
SWE**	33	32	32	32	35	33	33	35	33	33	34	34
RCV***	48	49	49	49	50	52	51	50	53	51	50	48
Total	81	81	81	81	85	85	84	85	86	84	84	82

*Ss: Students (Participants)

**SWE: Structure and Written Expressions

***RCV: Reading Comprehension and Vocabulary

The statistical formula $\frac{\Sigma MPT}{N}$ for the purpose of this study was the mean processing time = MPT, where ΣPT is the sum and MPT the mean of the time taken by individual participants to process the TL sentence for translation. The following tables indicate the time which each participant spent translating from English into Persian a question focused on a particular concept of the Persian tense structure mozare. As noted earlier, the longer a particular sentence took to translate, the more difficult it was.

For the purpose of this study, the scale of difficulty ran from 1 (*the least difficult*) to 5 (*the most difficult*). As the purpose of the study is to find the most difficult item bidirectionally, that is, from English into Persian and

from Persian into English, the MPT for each particular tense concept was calculated, and then the mean of the MPTs was calculated to decide generally which direction (L1-L2 or L2-L1) took longer to process the TL concepts of the Persian tense structure mozare for translation.

3. Results

As seen in Table 2, in translating from English into Persian, the MPT for each of the five equivalent target English concepts is shown in minutes such that the simple present tense took the longest time, and present perfect and future continuous took the shortest time to process for translation:

Table 2. *English-Persian Translation Difficulty Indicator: (Difficulty Ascending Order: 1> 2 > 3 > 4 >5)*

Questions		Minutes, MPT	Difficulty
1	Simple Present	1.30	5
2	Present Continuous	1.13	4
3	Will + Infinitive	1.13	4
4	Present Perfect Continuous	1.08	3
5	Future Continuous	1.08	3

MMPT for each concept = ΣMPT/N

MMPT = 5.72/5 = 1.14

*PT: Processing time

**MPT : Mean of processing time

Table 2 indicates the degree of difficulty expressed in minutes to process for translation. As shown in the table, in translating from English into Persian, the least difficult were the present perfect and future continuous (MPT = 1.08min) and, the most difficult was the simple present (MPT = 1.30 min). The other two went in between the two extremes. Obviously, the assumptions that are in order here are that:

- On the one hand, the density of each mozare translation concept into and from English across the text was taken equal.
- On the other hand, the density of other translation concepts into and from English was also taken to be equal.

It is only with these two assumptions in mind occurring in a text and other extratextual variables such as the translator's proficiency, environmental conditions, and so on that the claim can hold true.

Table 3 indicates the degree of difficulty expressed in minutes taken to process for translation. As shown in this table, in translating from Persian into English, the least difficult were the simple present and will + infinitive (MPT = 1.08 min), and the most difficult was the present perfect (MPT = 1.43 min). The other two went in between the two extremes:

Table 3. *Persian-English Translation Difficulty Indicator: (Difficulty Ascending Order: 1 > 2 > 3 > 4 > 5)*

Questions	Target Structure	Minutes, MPT	Difficulty
5	Simple Present	1.08	2
4	Present Continuous	1.13	3
3	Will + Infinitive	1.08	2
2	Present Perfect Continuous	1.43	5
1	Future Continuous	1.34	4

MMPT for each concept = ΣMPT/N

MMPT = 6.06/5 = 1.21

*PT : Processing time

**MPT : Mean of processing time

Finally, given the equal density of each concept of mozare and other process-prolonger items both in English-Persian and Persian-English translations, that is, if the number of L2 concepts and other items that prolong the process of translation were maintained equal, translating mozare from Persian into equivalent English concept structures would take longer (MMPT = 1.21 min) than from English into the Persian structure mozare (MMPT = 1.14 min).

4. Discussion and Conclusion

As seen in Table 2, in L2-L1 translation process, given the mean processing time of 1.30 min, it can be concluded that translating mozare into simple present into mozare is the most time-consuming process; hence, the most difficult. The issue merits further research to explore the variables contributing to the maximal processing time as opposed to translating into other corresponding tense concepts. Interestingly, translating future continuous or simple future into mozare took an equal length of time. This also deserves further research to examine the contributors to making the processes least difficult to translate.

As seen in Table 3, in L1-L2 translation process, translating mozare into the corresponding present perfect is the most time-consuming; hence, the most difficult. This merits exploration into what makes the process most time-consuming; hence; the most difficult. Put otherwise, the contributors to making the process most difficult need to be recognized. Interestingly, translating into simple present or simple future with *will* is least time-consuming; hence, the least difficult, taking an equal length of time. This also deserves further research. Translating into present continuous and future continuous took 1.13 and 1.34 min, respectively; hence, falling on an ascending order of difficulty of 3 and 4, respectively, which deserves further exploration.

Finally, as seen in Tables 2 and 3, L1-L2 translation for mozare concepts took 1.21 min, whereas L2-L1 translation for mozare corresponding concepts took 1.14 min; therefore, L1-L2 translation for mozare concepts takes longer; hence, is more difficult than L2-L1 translation for mozare corresponding concepts.

In view of the findings in Tables 2 and 3, all the three null hypotheses are rejected, and the following alternatives hypotheses are proposed:

- $H_{4:}$ Assuming that the participants' L1 is Persian and their L2 is English, one of the five corresponding concepts of the L1 structure mozare takes longest to translate into L2; hence, there is a continuum of difficulty or ease in translating into L2.
- $H_{5:}$ Assuming that the participants' L1 is Persian and their L2 is English, one of the five corresponding concepts of the L2 structure takes longest to translate into L1; hence, there is a continuum of difficulty or ease in translating into L1 mozare.
- $H_{6:}$ Assuming that the participants' L1 is Persian and their L2 is English, on average, only one direction of translation of the five mozare concepts, L1-L2 or L2-L1, takes a longer time to translate; hence, there is a continuum of difficulty or ease in translating.

Both in L1-L2 and L2-L1 mozare concepts translations, the variables that bear on the duration of each and every concept translation process need to be explored and provisions made to minimize the duration of each. Furthermore, whether or not the same holds for other Persian tense structures or other conceptual structures needs to be explored.

According to Hatim (2001), the findings of this study serve both the purposes of L2 teaching and translation alike. For L2 teaching, for the simple reason that L2 teaching is believed to involve translation (i.e., L1-L2 or L2-L1) or, at least, conceptual translation, once the findings

of the study are complemented with further studies focused on the variables affecting the duration of the translation process, the outcome could be graded pedagogically and incorporated into language-translator and language-teacher syllabi. Obviously, pedagogization involves research-based gradation of the materials.

It is reasonably advisable to interpret the findings of this study with reservation on the following grounds: (1) Ideally, the time that each participant records to indicate how long each sentence in Test II takes to process for translation must be monitored by one attendant; hence, there must be as many attendants, one assigned to each participant, as there are participants. (2) Test II must be repeated with as many proficiency-level groups and as similar proficiency participants as possible. (3) According to Robinson (2012), the TL structures must be tested in their natural linguistic contexts such that extraneous influences on the TL structures are maintained to their minimum. (4) Finally, the results of the scores need be interpreted with reservation on account of unforeseen variables missed or compromised.

We hope this study will be a pioneering effort in largely the development of translation materials. Further research into translation needs to be based on use frequency to pinpoint the structural items needed most and then similar studies be conducted to input the findings for pedagogization and ultimately materials development.

One consideration of prime importance is to develop alternatives for Test II such as interpretation in their natural contexts to see whether or not similar results can be obtained. By natural contexts is meant, for instance, an occasion when there is a real-life need for interpretation or translation for professional purposes such as simultaneous translation of a teacher's lecture or even a real press conference demanded.

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