A Study of Translation Problems of Tourism Industry Guidebooks: An Error Analysis Perspective

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Abstract

This study was motivated by the researchers' goal to unfold the quality of the English translations of Persian tourism industry texts and discover the most frequent error patterns the Iranian non-native translators have committed in such texts. Thus, the following research questions were addressed: 1) Are the English versions of Persian tourist guidebooks and multimedia compact discs provided by Iranian translators appropriate in terms of syntax, semantics and pragmatics?, and 2) What are the possible patterns of the errors found in English translations of Persian tourist guidebooks?

To answer these questions, three English tourist guidebooks translated from their Persian source texts into English by Iranian translators as well as two multimedia compact discs whose primary purpose was to introduce Isfahan tourist attractions in English were selected and carefully studied. Three hundred sentences were randomly extracted and subjected to error analysis. The results of the analysis indicated that over one-third of the total number of the sentences under study were syntactically, semantically or pragmatically erroneous. Thus, based on the proposed model of the study which was a combination of American Translation Association's (ATA, 2010) error identification categories and Keshavarz's (1993) linguistic taxonomy of errors, the most frequent errors were identified and statistically tabulated. Most of the syntactic errors came to belong to 'grammar' pattern, most semantic errors to 'terminology, word choice' pattern , most pragmatic errors to 'mistranslation into target language' error pattern, and most translation-specific errors were found to have an 'Incomplete Passage' pattern.

Keywords: Translation, tourism, tourist guidebook, error analysis, pragmatics

According to the World Tourism Organization (WTO), tourism is one of the world's largest industries and in the past 40 years, the number of people who have traveled internationally has increased from 65 to 560 million and by 2010 will generate $8 trillion of economic activity (Goeldner, Brent Ritchie, and McIntosh, 2000).

This rapid expansion of the international travel industry in the second half of the last century has increased the opportunities for intercultural communication (Leclerc and Martin, 2004) and has made the role of tourist text writers and tour guides much crucial than before as they are the agents in power of providing information about sites visited, places photographed and people encountered; they provide a text to the silent panorama, great historical places and monuments passing outside the windows of tour buses. They are often the culture interpreters -being the go-between for the tourists and local hosts; and their cultural and communication competence plays an important role for those local hosts receiving "hordes of culture-hungry tourists" (Leclerc and Martin, 2004).

However, it is likely that tourists' first step in booking their journey would have been to find a tourist guidebook of the town, city or tourist attraction they were interested in. This

highlights the importance of introducing a country's tourism attractions in the language of tourists. If a prospective tourist who does not know Persian, for example, finds that no part of the information (s)he is looking for is available in his or her language, it could mean we are losing potential business. Imagine you wish to arrange a trip to Japan and you know little or nothing of Japanese. Your first point of departure, when searching about your trip, is probably going to find a Japanese tour guidebook, where you can derive information about local sites of interest, entertainment, details and prices of hotels, etc. If the essential information is not provided in your mother tongue in correct and understandable language, what will you do? Do you look elsewhere? Do you decide to struggle on? Or do you decide to take a more local holiday? Thus, if visitors are to be attracted to any given country to enjoy the variety of attractions on offer, we need to make it easy for them to do it from the very beginning-- in all respects, especially in so far as language is concerned.

In Iran, tourist guidebooks are mostly written and translated by non-native speakers of English, e.g. Beheshti (2004), Shayesteh and Ghasemi (2004) and Nouri (2007), to mention just a few, whose first language is Persian. Therefore, their productions are likely to be affected by the phenomenon of *interference*. Interference refers to the influence of one type of behavior, a mother tongue linguistic behavior in this case, on one that is learned later, foreign language linguistic behavior (Keshavarz, 1993). As a result of such interference, various types of errors are likely to occur in their productions, the most frequent of which are grammatical, semantic and pragmatic errors (Mahmoodi, 2007). Such errors committed by the writers and translators of tourist guidebooks will most likely result in misunderstanding, distorting the information or even conveying wrong information to the (Mahmoodi, 2007).

Taking into account the above mentioned issues and based on the impression of the present researchers' investigations demonstrating that few researches have paid due attention to the role of tourist guidebooks and tour guides in the development of tourism industry in Iran and elsewhere, the necessity of conducting a research in this area was felt. The present research was, therefore, designed to focus on the role of language, specially the process of translation, in conveying correct information to tourists. The following questions were thus posed to be addressed:

Research Questions
1. Are the English versions of Persian tourist guidebooks and multimedia compact discs produced by Iranian translators appropriate in terms of syntax, semantics and pragmatics?
2. What are the possible patterns of the errors found in English translations of Persian tourist guidebooks?

Background of the Study

The impression of these researchers' review of tourism-related literature written in Iran is that majority of conducted researches are case studies whose main concern is to introduce a city or a village as an attractive tourist site and to offer solutions for removing the obstacles hindering the local development of tourism industry in such places. Examples of such studies are: *Tourism Planning: the Case Study of Astara* (Dehestani, 2004), *Design of Tous Cultural Tourism Complex* (Yazdani, 2004), *Kish Five Star International Hotel* (Abbasi, 2003), *the Investigation of Determining Factors on Domestic Tourism in Hamedan Province* (Jamshidi, 2003).

An important point to note is that although most of the works cited and other related works have attempted to take new steps in the development of local tourism industry, especially in enhancing the number of foreign tourists, they have rarely taken into consideration the role of language and linguistic issues at work in attracting or distracting tourists. Almost no

reference was found about tourist guidebooks and tour guides as important factors of introducing Iran and Iranian culture to the world.

At international level, however, more significance has been attributed to the role of tourist guidebooks and tour guides in the development of tourism industry. For instance, "Tour guide communication competence: French, German and American tourists' perceptions" (Leclerc and Martin, 2004) looks at tour guides as cultural buffers and communication links between tourists and host populations. The authors of this study examine some communication competence features of a number of tour guides as conceived by tourists visiting the US Southwest from France, Germany, and the United States. One dimension of the communication competence examined in this study is verbal which includes using appropriate grammar, presenting ideas clearly, choosing words carefully, speaking clearly and avoiding slang. This study finally concludes that there are significant differences in the perceptions of important communication competencies among the three nationality groups.

Ap and Wong (2001) believe that "tour guides are one of the key front-line players in the tourism industry. Through their knowledge and interpretation of a destination's attractions and culture, and their communication and service skills, they have the ability to transform the tourists' visit from a tour into an experience. In this study, tour guiding issues were identified through an extensive series of in-depth and focus group interviews. Based on the findings, it is recognized that the experiences faced by the Hong Kong tour guides are unlikely to be unique and there may be some issues and problems raised that are common to the guiding profession in most other countries. However, very few studies about the professional status and issues faced by the tour guiding profession have been reported in the English-based literature and this study would represent one of the first attempts to do so" (p. 1).

Milton and Garbi (2000) in their work titled "Error types in the computer-aided translation of tourism texts" attempted a computer-driven translation package for tourism texts in 5 languages. It was believed that such a package would be possible due to the highly formulaic language of tourism brochures and business communication in this sector, which should allow translation equivalents at the phrase or sentence level to be identified and used. While this proved to be broadly true, the multilanguage format produced errors of agreement and ordering normally avoided by human and computer translators working between two languages. Even at the phrase and sentence level, problems of interlanguage equivalence persisted.

Another work to mention is "Exploring Knowledge and Skills for Tourist Guides: Evidence from Egypt" (Khayri El-Sharkawy, 2007). She believes that tourist guides, like all employees within the travel (Tourism) industry must be aware of the needs of travelers (Tourists) and adjust their service and products accordingly. To accomplish this goal, she adds, tourist guides are expected to process knowledge of guiding. She measures the degree of the influence of the area of study and the level of knowledge on experienced tourist guides through a research conducted on 200 out of 6846-- the working population of tourist guides in 2005, licensed to work in the field by the Ministry of Tourism in Egypt. She uses a self-administered questionnaire which reveals important results showing defects in the areas of study and shortage in the background knowledge of the tourist guides to certain extents. In the conclusion, she proposes a guiding scheme to develop a certain standard of education and knowledge needed by tourist guides in Egypt in their drive towards professional recognition, in order to be able to perform effectively in this increasingly competitive field.

Contrastive Analysis and Translation

The emphasis of much of the work in contrastive analysis (CA) on teaching and language learning raises questions about its relevance to translation. At a practical level, it is probably most useful in pointing out areas where direct translation of a term or phrase will not convey

accurately in the second language its original intended meaning. At a global level, translators look at broader issues such as whether the structure of the discourse for a given text-type is the same in both languages. Furthermore, although CA is widely practiced, there is a number of theoretical and practical problems in its application all of which must affect judgments as to its usefulness in preparing or evaluating translations. There is some overlap between these problems but they can nevertheless be related to specific difficulties of identifying a common ground for comparison, comparing descriptions of different languages, taking account of psycholinguistic and sociocultural factors, and taking account of extratextual and intertextual factors.

The relationship between CA and translation is bidirectional. On the one hand, the translation of specific pieces of text may provide the data for CA and, on the other, CA may provide explanations of difficulties encountered in translation

Translation as a source of data for CA is strictly unavoidable. The crucial factors here are what size of language sample has been chosen for translation. Whether it is naturally occurring or fabricated for the purpose and whether the translation is the analyst's own. Though the focus of CA may continue to shift towards pragmatics and discourse analysis, its use in translation is not inevitable. It is however unlikely that it can be dispensed with completely either in the training of translators or in the assessment of translations. Even in its more traditional lexico-grammatical manifestations, Halliday (1985: xvii) notes that 'a discourse analysis that is not based on grammar is not an analysis at all but simply a running commentary on a text'. He adds that '[although] a text is a semantic unit not a grammatical one, meanings are realized through wordings: and without a theory of wording-s-that is a grammar-there is no way of making explicit one's interpretation of the meaning of the text' (p. xvii). Baker (1992) cites the latter comment with approval in a book that is itself an indication of the continued vitality of CA as an aid to translation.

Tourism and Language

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. Its aim is "to persuade, lure, woo and seduce millions of human beings, and, in so doing, convert them from potential into actual clients" (Dann, 1996: 2). As a consequence, the need for language experts in this field is growing steadily because the writing of effective promotional materials requires a high level of language competence and is vital to achieve success in a field characterized by keen competition.

Tourism as Specialized Discourse

Although the field of tourism is greatly influenced by other disciplines, its language shows peculiar lexical, syntactic and textual features which justify its inclusion among the many LSPs. Among the text types aimed at non-specialists, MacLeod et al (2009) identify four typologies i.e. 1) leaflets, 2) brochures, 3) travelogues and 4) travel guides. However, the range of text types is wider (e.g. tourist adverts, package-tour itineraries, unsolicited promotional letters, etc.). Dann (1996) classifies tourist text types according to the medium they use (audio, visual, written, sensory) and to their stage in the tourist cycle (pre/ on, /post trip). Dann classifies tourist text types into pre-trip (adverts, leaflets, brochures), on-trip (travel guides, travelogues) and post-trip (trip reports, reviews). Leaflet is usually a single sheet or a folded piece of paper. Although practical information is sometimes provided, the main communicative purpose of a leaflet is to persuade potential tourists to visit a place or facility; therefore, the messages are usually short and clear and the aesthetic component is particularly important (prevalence of pictures). Brochures have two main communicative functions. Firstly they provide practical information which visitors may use in their trip

decision making and planning processes (informative) and secondly they establish an image of the destination as a viable alternative when planning future trips (Fesermaier, 2000 in MacLeod et al (2009).Travelogues are articles written by (sponsored) journalists and published in the travel sections of newspapers and magazines and trip reports written by independent tourists and posted on travelogue sites in the internet (e.g. www.travelhog.net). The prevailing function of travelogues is narrative (they sometimes include negative comments on the places visited or on the facilities used; they often offer advice on how to best do things).They are often organized into sections like travel guides.

Models of Error Analysis in Translation

There is no unified model to classify translation errors. Two models are, however, outstanding. One model proposed by ATA (2010) includes 22 types of errors suggested to be used as criteria for classifying and grading errors. They are as follows: 1) Incomplete passage, 2) Illegible handwriting, 3) Misunderstanding of the original text,4) Mistranslation into target language, 5) Addition or omission, 6) Terminology, word choice, 7) Register, 8) Too freely translated, 9) Too literal, word-for-word translation, 10) False cognate, 11) Indecision in word choice, 12) Inconsistent, 13) Ambiguity, 14) Grammar, 15) Syntax, 16) Punctuation, 17) Spelling, 18) Accents and other diacritical marks, 19) Case (upper case/lower case), 20) Word form, 21) Usage and 22) Style.

This list needs, however, to be improved to be a sufficient model in error classification, not only at the level of words but also at the levels of sentences and discourse. Baer and Koby (2003) have suggested some ways to improve it.

Another classification model for translation errors is the one used by the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters in Australia (NAATI). The NAATI model is based on the following eight criteria 1. Mistranslation, 2. Inappropriate vocabulary, 3. Incorrect punctuation, 4. Incorrect grammar, 5. Incorrect spelling, 6. Distortion of meaning, 7. Unidiomatic usage, 8. Stylistic infelicities. These criteria are believed to be vague and the specific meanings of the sentences are often left to the interpretation of individual evaluators (Gentile, 1997).

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Methodology

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Materials

Two types of materials were used in this study: 1) three tourist guidebooks translated from their Persian source texts into English by Iranian translators, and 2) two multimedia compact discs whose primary purpose was introducing Isfahan province historical sites and tourist attractions in English. The books under study were:

1. *Isfahan a Small but Earthly Paradise* (Shayesteh and Ghasemi, 2004).
2. *Iran, Isfahan Province, the Investment Prospects* (Nouri, 2007).
3. *Isfahan: Resplendence of Beauty* (Vakilzadeh, 2006).

These books were chosen from among the plenty of other similar books in tourism industry due to their recent publication, their being among the best sellers of tourist guidebooks and their comprehensive treatment of their subject matter.

The multimedia compact discs under study were: 1) Firuzeh, and 2) Negin. These two compact discs were produced and endorsed by Cultural Heritage, Handicraft and Tourism Organization of Isfahan. This was the primary reason for choosing them from among the plethora of similar discs.

Data Collection Procedures

Through comparing and contrasting the original Persian texts of the books under study with their English translations, 110 erroneous translations were identified and listed in a parallel

corpus in which Persian source texts were arranged in a column opposite to their English equivalents provided by the translators of the books and the developers of compact discs.

Data Analysis Procedures

In order to address the research questions posed earlier in the study, the following procedures were embarked on. First, the corpus of English translations of tourism guidebooks and tourism texts included in compact discs were subjected to error analysis and a categorization of the most frequent error types was provided based on the taxonomy of errors in translation provided by ATA (see 2.4.).

Second, the above 22 error types were recategorized and classified under three broader types of syntactic, semantic and pragmatic errors. This second classification of errors was based on the linguistic taxonomy of errors provided by Keshavarz (1993) which was in turn very similar to the taxonomy proposed by Hendrickson (1979). The difference between these two taxonomies stemmed from the fact that in the former's classification the errors were categorized under two broad headings: syntactic-morphological errors and lexico-semantic errors. But, in the latter's classification, errors were categorized as grammatical and semantic. Thus, although the definitions of the error types were the same, the labels were different.

Keshavarz's (1993) taxonomy provided the basis for the first categorization of errors in the present study. However, to be more straightforward, Hendrickson's (1979) taxonomy was adopted and thus Keshavarz's category, "syntactic-morphological errors", was labeled as "syntactic errors" and his category "lexico-semantic errors" as "semantic errors". Moreover, to categorize errors as pragmatic, the information gained from Webster's *New Dictionary of Synonyms: a Dictionary of Discriminated Synonyms with Antonyms and Analogous and Contrasted Words* (1984)*, The Merriam-Webster Dictionary of Synonyms and Antonyms* (1994) and the definitions proposed by Richards, Platt, and Platt (1992) and Miremadi (1991) were taken into consideration.

Third, in order to make the categorization of discovered error types more precise and comprehensive, a hybrid model was designed by the researchers which is a combination of ATA's categorization of error types and Keshavarz's linguistic taxonomy of errors. In fact, it was attempted to classify the detailed twenty two error types introduced by ATA under the three broader categories proposed by Keshavarz. However two error types were considered to be translation-specific which the researchers put under a separate category i.e. 'Translation Specific Errors'. The table 1 shows the proposed model.

Table 1. *A Hybrid Model of Error Types*

1	Syntactic Errors	1.	Grammar
		2.	Syntax
		3.	Punctuation
		4.	Usage
2	Semantic Errors	1.	Addition or omission
		2.	Terminology, word choice
		3.	Too freely translated
		4.	Too literal, word-for-word translation
		5.	False cognate
		6.	Ambiguity
		7.	Accents and other diacritical marks
		8.	Case (upper case/lower case)
		9.	Word form
		10.	Spelling
3	Pragmatic Errors	1.	Misunderstanding of the original text
		2.	Mistranslation into target language
		3.	Register
		4.	Style

4	Translation-Specific Errors	1. Incomplete passage 2. Inconsistency

Results and Discussion

Based on the above-mentioned procedures and the proposed model, data analysis was done and some results were obtained. Table 2 displays the results concerning the total number of the translated sentences under study, the total number of erroneous sentences, the total number of errors in the corpus and the number and frequency of the error types identified.

Table 2. *Error Types and Frequency of Errors*

	Translated Sentences	Erroneous Sentences	Recognize-d Errors	Syntactic Errors	Semantic Errors	Pragmatic Errors	Translation-Specific Errors
Number	300	110	132	44	60	18	10
Frequency		36.66%		33.33%	45.45%	13.63%	7.57%

As Table 2 indicates, out 300 sentences under study, 110 sentences were recognized as erroneous which comprises more than 36 percent of the corpus. 132 errors were discovered in the erroneous sentences. Out of these erroneous items, 33.33 percent (44 cases) were syntactic, 45.45 percent (60 cases) were semantic, 13.63 percent (18 cases) were pragmatic and 7.57 percent (10 cases) were categorized as translation-specific errors. Chart 1 below illustrates the frequency of identified errors more clearly:
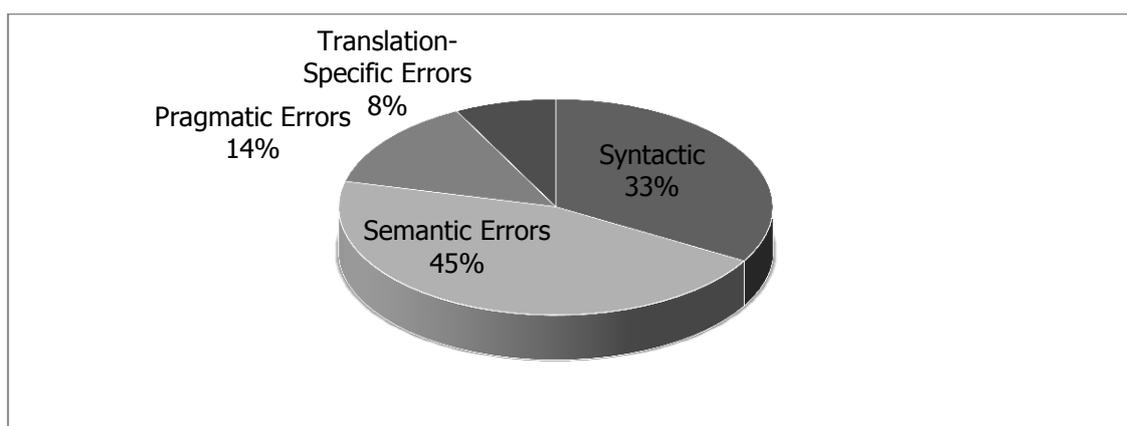

Chart 1. Frequency of Identified Errors

In response to the first research question concerning the appropriateness of English translations of Persian tourism texts, 300 sentences were randomly chosen from the books and compact discs under study. As mentioned before, out of these 300 sentences 110 sentences were erroneous, comprising more than 36% of the whole corpus of the study. Considering the crucial role tourism texts play in introducing a country, its culture as well as tourist attractions to the world and the fact that the intended readership of such texts are

native speakers of English or the people who are not familiar with Persian language, producing tourist texts with such quality will surely result in misunderstanding, distorting the information or even conveying wrong information to the tourists.

To answer the second research question related to the patterns of errors occurred in English translation of Persian tourist texts, the errors identified were categorized into four major error types of syntactic, semantic, pragmatic and language-specific. Charts (2-5) reveal the four resultant error patterns and their frequency of occurrence:
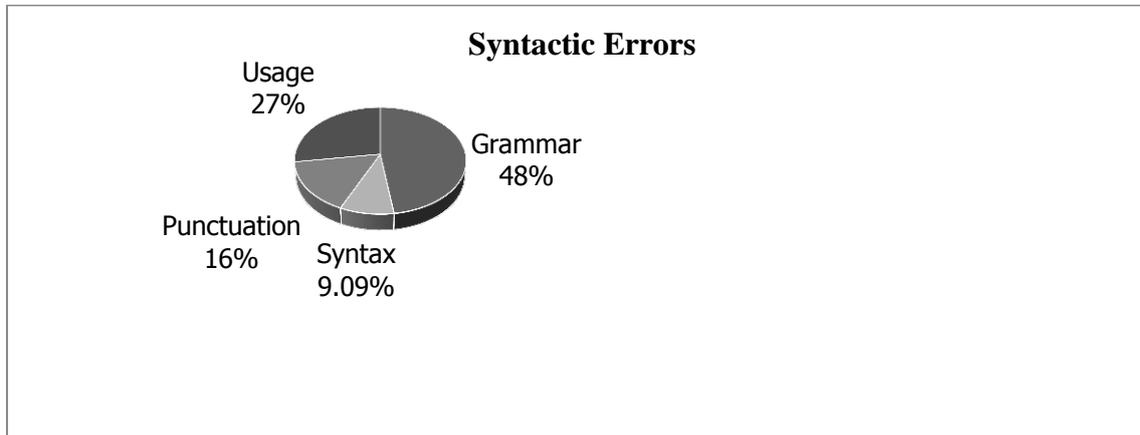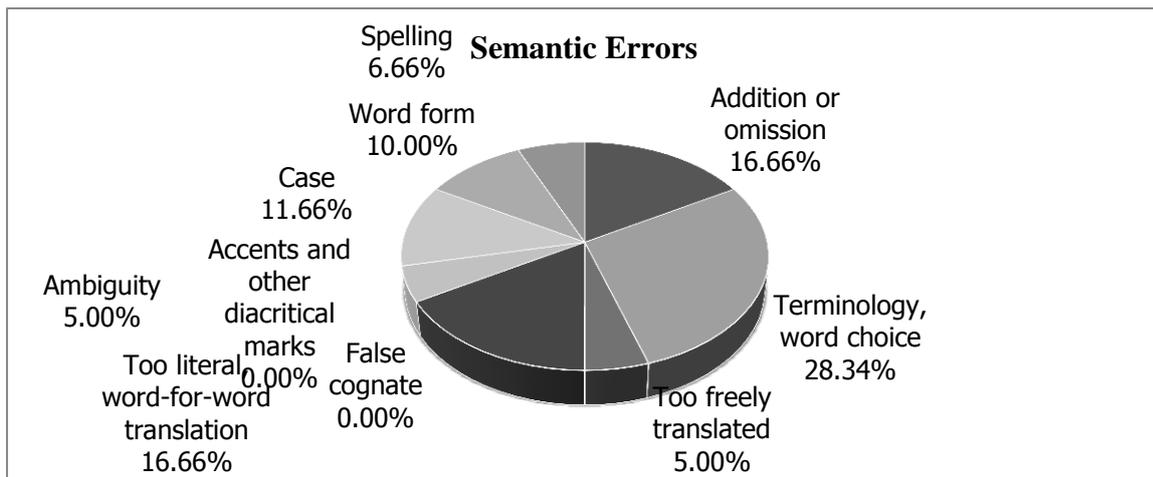
Syntactic Errors

Usage 27%
Grammar 48%
Punctuation 16%
Syntax 9.09%

Chart 2

Spelling 6.66% **Semantic Errors**
Word form 10.00%
Addition or omission 16.66%
Case 11.66%
Accents and other diacritical marks 0.00%
Ambiguity 5.00%
Too literal word-for-word translation 16.66%
False cognate 0.00%
Terminology, word choice 28.34%
Too freely translated 5.00%

Chart 3

Pragmatic Errors

Style 0.00%
Misunderstanding of the original text 11.11%
Register 33.33%
Mistranslation Into Target Language

Chart 4

Translation-specific Errors

0.00%   0.00%
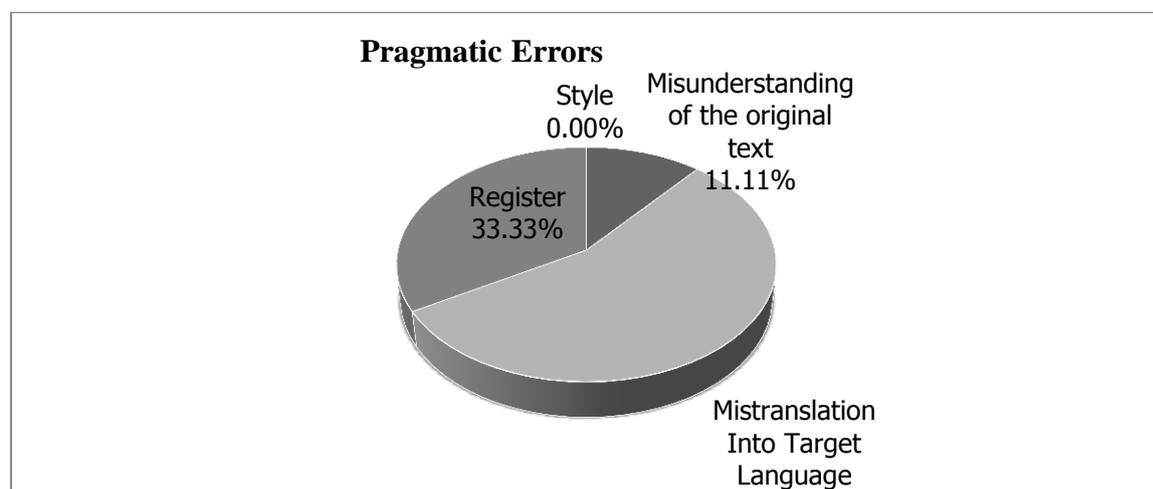
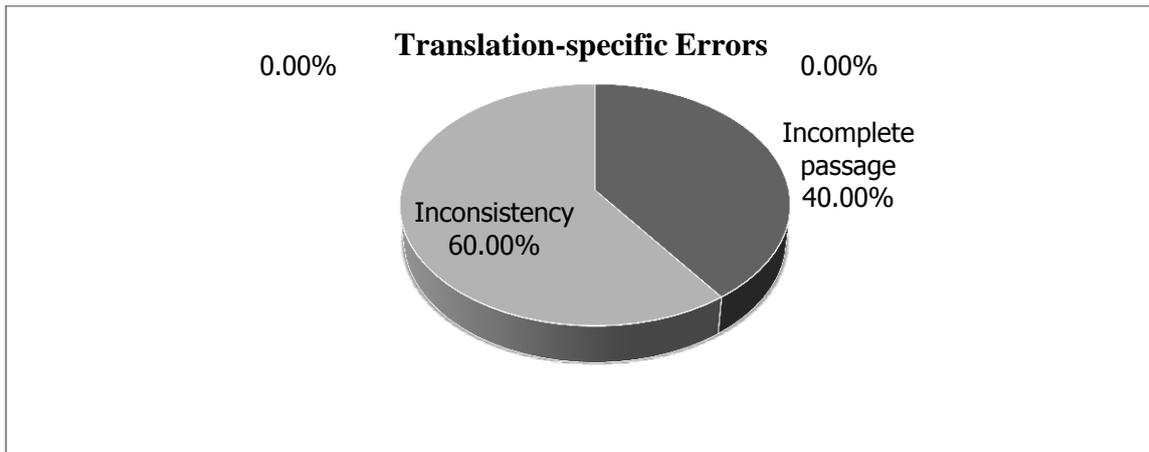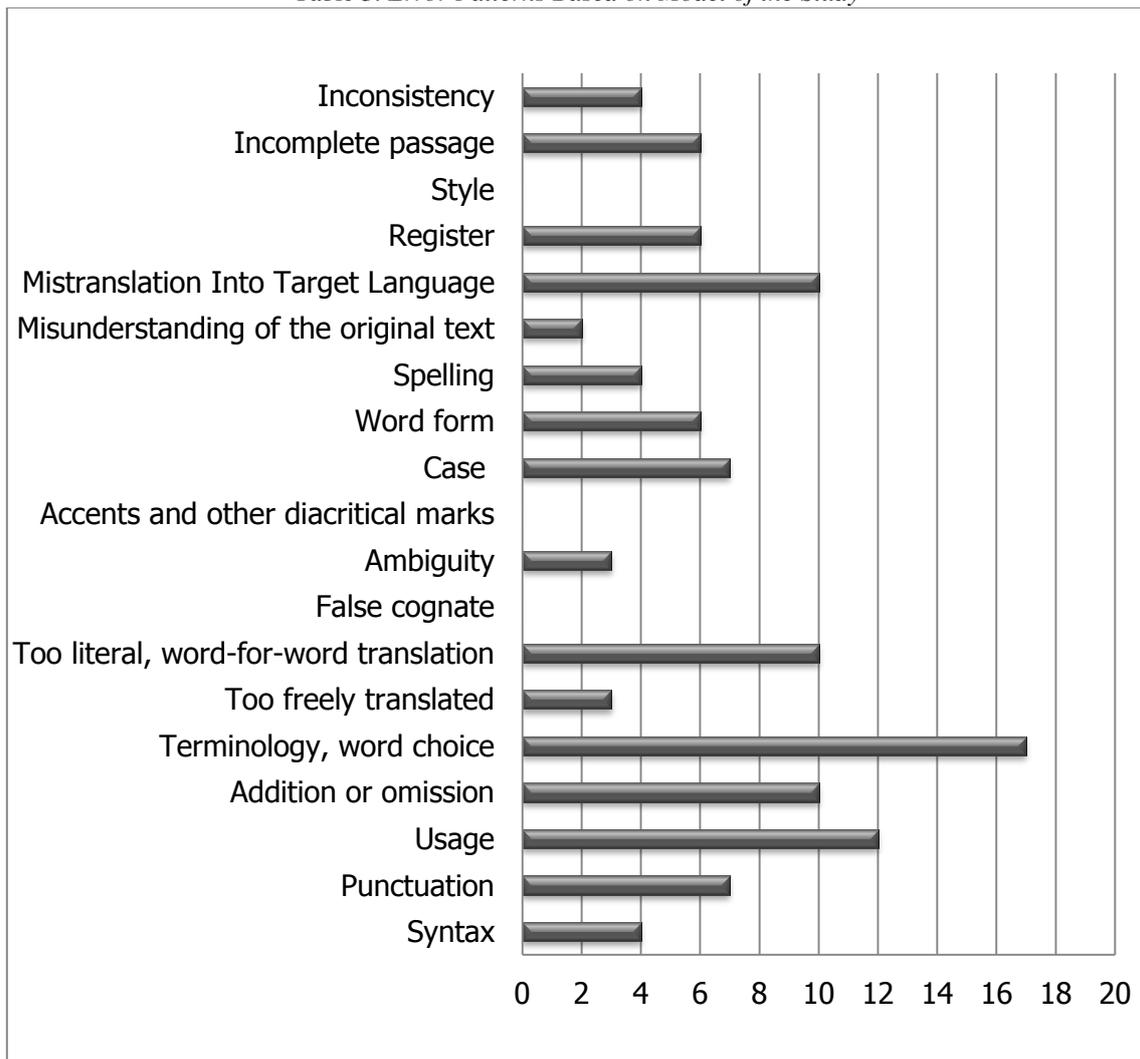Incomplete
passage
40.00%

Inconsistency
60.00%

Chart 5

The above resulting error patterns which correspond to the proposed model of the study are illustrated in Table 3 below:

Table 3. *Error Patterns Based on Model of the Study*

Error Pattern	Value
Inconsistency	4
Incomplete passage	6
Style	0
Register	6
Mistranslation Into Target Language	10
Misunderstanding of the original text	2
Spelling	4
Word form	6
Case	7
Accents and other diacritical marks	0
Ambiguity	3
False cognate	0
Too literal, word-for-word translation	10
Too freely translated	3
Terminology, word choice	17
Addition or omission	10
Usage	12
Punctuation	7
Syntax	4

Conclusions

Based on the discussion of the results obtained from the present study, the following conclusions can be drawn:

The findings of the research indicated that more than one third of the investigated translated sentences extracted randomly from tourism industry texts books and multimedia compact discs were erroneous.

The findings also indicated that most of the errors discovered in the examined materials were syntactic, semantic, pragmatic and translation-specific with semantic errors having the largest and translation-specific errors the smallest number of errors.

It is to be noted that based on the study's hybrid model of error classification, most syntactic errors belonged to 'grammar' pattern, most semantic errors belonged to 'terminology, word choice' pattern, most pragmatic errors belonged to 'mistranslation into target language' error pattern, and most translation-specific errors belonged to 'Incomplete Passage' pattern.

Generally speaking, the findings were line with Brown's (1994) idea that native language interference is the most immediately noticeable source of error in translating from native language into the target one. According to him , in foreign language learning, interlingual transfer i.e. transfer from the mother tongue or any other previously learned language, is a major strategy that learners fall back on when their linguistic means fall short of achieving their communicative ends. This is true also for the translators who translate into English tourism texts written originally in Persian.

A final word here is that the findings of this study can be a warning to the authorities in Cultural Heritage, Handicraft and Tourism Organization to pay more attention to the linguistic quality of the textbooks and multimedia compact discs through which Iran, Iranian culture and tourism attractions are being introduced to the world, for spending huge sums of money on the development of tourism industry cannot be rewarding unless the necessary media are linguistically appropriate. This is also true for tourism industry worldwide. Furthermore, the findings can be used as guidelines for translators and non-native English writers the world over, who are involved in the task of writing English tourist books, since offering a categorization of the most frequent error types occurring in tourism texts will help future non-native writers and translators avoid them and produce more refined texts in terms of language.

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