

Grammatical Constraints in Translating Arabic Literary Texts into English: A Functional Perspective

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القيود النحوية في ترجمة النصوص الأدبية العربية إلى اللغة الإنجليزية: منظور وظيفي

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المخلص:

تمثل الاختلافات النحوية بين اللغتين العربية والإنجليزية تحديات مستمرة في الترجمة الأدبية، وذلك لأن كلتا اللغتين تنظمان المعنى من خلال أنظمة لغوية وخطابية تختلف اختلافاً جوهرياً. وتتناول هذه الدراسة أبرز القيود النحوية التي تواجه ترجمة النصوص الأدبية العربية إلى الإنجليزية، مع التركيز على خمسة مجالات مترابطة هي: المبني للمجهول، والتقديم والتأخير، والجنس النحوي، والاتساق النصي، وعلامات الترقيم. واستناداً إلى النظريات الوظيفية في الترجمة، ولا سيما مفاهيم التطابق الديناميكي، والتطابق النحوي، والتحويلات الترجمانية، واللسانيات الوظيفية النفسية، تناقش الدراسة بأن نجاح الترجمة الأدبية يعتمد على الحفاظ على الوظيفة التواصلية للنص أكثر من اعتماده على إعادة إنتاج بنيته النحوية. وباستخدام تحليل مقارن نوعي مدعوم بأمثلة توضيحية من الخطاب الأدبي العربي، تبحث الدراسة في الكيفية التي تسهم بها البنى النحوية في تشكيل المنظور السردي، وبناء المعلومات، والاتساق النصي، والتعبير الأسلوبي، وتأويل القارئ. وتبين النتائج أن المطابقة النحوية الحرفية كثيراً ما تؤدي إلى ترجمات صحيحة من الناحية التركيبية، لكنها تبدو غير طبيعية من الناحية الأسلوبية، وتفتقر إلى الفاعلية التواصلية. ومن ثم، ينبغي للمترجمين تقويم الوظيفة الخطابية للأشكال النحوية في سياقاتها النصية والثقافية قبل اختيار التراكيب المناسبة في اللغة الهدف. كما تكشف الدراسة أن صيغ المبني للمجهول، وترتيب مكونات الجملة، وعلامات الجنس النحوي، ووسائل الاتساق، وعلامات الترقيم، تعمل بوصفها موارد خطابية مترابطة، لا مجرد عناصر نحوية منفصلة، الأمر الذي يتطلب من المترجمين تبني مقاربة متكاملة قائمة على الوظيفة. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن التحويلات النحوية ينبغي أن تُعدّ قرارات ترجمة استراتيجية، لا انحرافات عن النص المصدر. كما توضح أن التطابق النحوي الوظيفي يوفر إطاراً أكثر شمولاً لمعالجة الفروق النحوية بين العربية والإنجليزية، مع الحفاظ على المعنى الأدبي، والأثر الأسلوبي، واستجابة القارئ. وتسهم الدراسة في إثراء بحوث الترجمة العربية-الإنجليزية من خلال دمج النظريات الكلاسيكية للتطابق مع المقاربات الخطابية المعاصرة، كما تقدم دلالات تطبيقية للمترجمين المحترفين، وبرامج إعداد المترجمين، والبحوث المستقبلية في مجال الترجمة الأدبية.

الكلمات الدالة: الترجمة الأدبية العربية- الإنجليزية، القيود النحوية، التطابق الوظيفي.

Abstract

Grammatical differences between Arabic and English present persistent challenges in literary translation because the two languages organise meaning through fundamentally different linguistic and discourse systems. This study investigates the major grammatical constraints encountered in translating Arabic literary texts into English, focusing on five interrelated areas: passive voice, word order, grammatical gender, textual connectivity, and punctuation. Drawing on functional approaches to translation, particularly the concepts of dynamic equivalence, grammatical equivalence, translation shifts, and systemic functional linguistics, the study argues that successful literary translation depends on preserving communicative function rather than reproducing grammatical form.

Using a qualitative comparative analysis supported by illustrative examples from Arabic literary discourse, the paper examines how grammatical structures contribute to narrative perspective, information structure, cohesion, stylistic expression, and reader interpretation. The findings demonstrate that literal grammatical correspondence frequently produces translations that are structurally accurate but stylistically unnatural and communicatively ineffective. Instead, translators must evaluate the discourse function of grammatical forms within their textual and cultural contexts before selecting appropriate target-language structures. The analysis further shows that passive constructions, constituent order, gender marking, cohesive devices, and punctuation operate as interconnected discourse resources rather than isolated grammatical features, requiring translators to adopt an integrated, function-oriented approach.

The study concludes that grammatical shifts should be regarded as strategic translation decisions rather than departures from the source text. Functional grammatical equivalence provides a more comprehensive framework for resolving Arabic–English grammatical differences while preserving literary meaning, stylistic effect, and reader response. The paper contributes to Arabic–English translation studies by integrating classical theories of equivalence with contemporary discourse-based approaches and offers practical implications for professional translators, translator education, and future research on literary translation.

Keywords: Arabic–English literary translation, grammatical constraints, functional equivalence.

1. Introduction

Translation is a complex process of intercultural communication through which linguistic structures, cultural meanings, and communicative intentions are transferred from one language to another. Although vocabulary has traditionally received considerable attention in translation practice and research, grammatical structure represents an equally significant dimension of meaning construction. Grammar determines how information is organised, how relationships between participants are expressed, how events are presented, and how textual coherence is achieved. Therefore, translators must address not only lexical differences but also the grammatical systems that shape meaning in both source and target languages.

The translation of literary texts presents particularly demanding grammatical challenges because literary language functions simultaneously at semantic, stylistic, and aesthetic levels. Unlike purely informative texts, literary works frequently use grammatical structures as stylistic devices that influence narrative voice, emphasis, rhythm, and character representation. Consequently, literary translators are required to reproduce not only the literal meaning of the source text but also its artistic and communicative effects. This challenge becomes especially evident in Arabic–English literary translation, as Arabic and English belong to different linguistic traditions and display significant differences in syntax, morphology, discourse organisation, and rhetorical patterns.

Arabic and English differ considerably in their grammatical systems. Arabic allows greater flexibility in word order, makes extensive use of inflectional morphology, marks grammatical gender throughout its structure, and employs distinctive mechanisms of textual cohesion. English, in contrast, relies more heavily on fixed word order, analytical grammatical constructions, and punctuation to express relationships between ideas and organise discourse. These differences often prevent direct grammatical correspondence and require translators to make strategic decisions that balance faithfulness to the original text with grammatical naturalness and acceptability in English.

The concept of equivalence has played a central role in translation studies as a theoretical framework for addressing such challenges. Earlier approaches often viewed equivalence primarily in terms of maintaining formal similarities between source and target texts. However, modern translation theories have increasingly emphasised that successful translation involves reproducing communicative function rather than simply preserving linguistic form. Nida's distinction between formal and dynamic equivalence marked an important development by shifting attention from structural similarity towards the effect of translation on the target reader. Later approaches, including functionalist theories, systemic functional linguistics, and discourse-oriented perspectives, further reinforced the view that translation should be evaluated according to its ability to achieve meaningful and functional correspondence.

Despite extensive research on translation equivalence, grammatical constraints in Arabic–English literary translation remain insufficiently examined from a contemporary functional perspective. Previous studies have often focused on individual grammatical features or general linguistic comparisons without fully investigating how translators manage grammatical differences within authentic literary contexts. Furthermore, recent developments in translation studies highlight the importance of translator decision-making, textual function, cultural context, and reader response, suggesting the need for a broader analysis of grammatical choices in literary translation.

This study aims to address this research gap by examining the major grammatical constraints involved in translating Arabic literary texts into English. Adopting a functional approach, the study views grammar not as a set of isolated rules but as a communicative resource through which meaning, style, cohesion, and aesthetic effects are constructed. The analysis focuses on five major areas of grammatical divergence between Arabic and English: passive voice, word order, gender, textual connectivity, and punctuation. These areas have been selected because they represent recurring difficulties in Arabic–English translation and frequently require translators to apply grammatical shifts to produce accurate, natural, and stylistically appropriate target texts.

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the principal grammatical constraints encountered in translating Arabic literary texts into English?
2. How do grammatical differences between Arabic and English influence translators' choices and strategies?
3. Which translation strategies best preserve functional equivalence while maintaining literary style and meaning?
4. How can a functional approach improve the quality and naturalness of Arabic–English literary translation?

This research contributes to translation studies in three main ways. First, it provides a systematic examination of key grammatical challenges affecting Arabic–English literary translation. Second, it combines established theories of equivalence with contemporary functional approaches to develop an analytical framework for understanding grammatical shifts. Third, it offers practical insights that may benefit professional translators, translation educators, and students by providing strategies for addressing recurrent grammatical problems in literary translation.

The paper is organised as follows: the next section reviews relevant theoretical perspectives on translation equivalence and grammatical constraints. This is followed by an explanation of the research methodology. The analytical sections then examine passive voice, word order, gender, textual connectivity, and punctuation as major areas of grammatical divergence. Finally, the study discusses the findings in relation to current translation theories and concludes with implications for translation research and professional practice.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Translation Equivalence and the Nature of Grammatical Constraints

Translation is widely recognised as a complex process of intercultural communication that involves the transfer of meaning, style, intention, and cultural values rather than the simple substitution of words between languages. Within this process, grammar plays a fundamental role because it determines how

information is structured, how relationships between participants are expressed, and how texts achieve coherence. Therefore, grammatical differences between languages represent significant challenges for translators, particularly in literary translation, where grammatical choices contribute to narrative voice, stylistic effects, and aesthetic expression.

The concept of translation equivalence has occupied a central position in translation studies, although its definition remains highly debated. Contemporary approaches generally reject the idea that successful translation depends on direct structural correspondence between source and target languages. Instead, translators must identify which aspects of meaning, function, and style should be preserved in order to create an effective target text. This issue is particularly important in Arabic–English translation, as the two languages differ considerably in grammatical structure, syntax, morphology, and discourse organisation.

One of the earliest influential approaches to translation equivalence was proposed by Catford (1965), who viewed translation as the replacement of textual material in one language with equivalent material in another. He distinguished between formal correspondence, which refers to similarities between linguistic categories, and textual equivalence, which concerns actual translation solutions in specific contexts. His theory of translation shifts demonstrated that grammatical changes are often unavoidable because similar grammatical structures may perform different functions across languages. Although Catford’s model has been criticised for giving limited attention to cultural and pragmatic factors, his distinction between formal correspondence and textual equivalence remains useful in explaining why translators frequently need to restructure grammatical patterns.

A major development in translation theory came with Nida’s distinction between formal and dynamic equivalence. Nida (1964) argued that translation should not focus solely on reproducing the form of the original text but should aim to achieve an equivalent effect on the target reader. Formal equivalence attempts to preserve linguistic structures, whereas dynamic equivalence prioritises natural expression and communicative impact. Nida and Taber (1969) further emphasised the importance of producing “the closest natural equivalent” of the source message, suggesting that grammatical modification is often necessary to preserve meaning and style. This approach is particularly relevant to literary translation, where reader response and aesthetic effect are central considerations.

Later scholars expanded the concept of equivalence beyond linguistic similarity. Koller (1979) proposed a multidimensional model of equivalence that includes denotative, connotative, text-normative, pragmatic, and formal-aesthetic dimensions. This framework highlights the complexity of literary translation, where grammatical structures may contribute not only to meaning but also to style and artistic expression. Consequently, grammatical decisions should be evaluated according to their communicative and aesthetic functions rather than through structural comparison alone.

Baker (2018) further developed the discussion of grammatical equivalence by emphasising that languages organise experience through different grammatical systems. Differences in tense, aspect, voice, gender, number, and information structure often require translators to modify grammatical patterns to maintain meaning and naturalness. Baker distinguishes between obligatory grammatical changes caused by differences between language systems and optional changes determined by context and stylistic considerations. Her approach is especially significant for Arabic–English translation because the two languages frequently lack direct grammatical equivalents.

The functionalist approach in translation studies further challenged traditional views of equivalence by arguing that translation strategies should be determined by the purpose or function of the target text. Vermeer’s (1989) Skopos theory maintains that translators should make decisions according to the intended communicative purpose of the translation rather than strict adherence to source-language structures. Nord (2018) developed this perspective through the concept of functional loyalty, which requires translators to balance faithfulness to the source text with responsibility towards target readers. From this viewpoint, grammatical restructuring is not considered a failure of equivalence but an essential strategy for achieving effective communication.

Systemic functional linguistics has also contributed significantly to the understanding of grammatical translation. Halliday and Hasan (1976) demonstrated that grammar functions as a resource for creating meaning, cohesion, and coherence rather than merely representing formal rules. Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) further argued that language provides choices through which speakers express ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings. This perspective is particularly valuable in literary translation because

grammatical structures influence not only information content but also relationships, perspective, and textual organisation. Translators must therefore consider how grammatical changes affect the overall interpretation and stylistic quality of the target text.

Recent translation scholarship has increasingly viewed translation as intercultural mediation rather than linguistic replacement. House (2015) argues that translation quality depends on the extent to which the target text successfully performs the function of the source text within a different cultural and linguistic context. Similarly, Munday (2022) highlights the shift in contemporary translation studies from analysing isolated linguistic elements towards examining translation as a socially and culturally situated activity. These perspectives encourage translators to consider grammatical choices within broader textual and communicative contexts.

The relationship between domestication and foreignisation also influences grammatical decisions in literary translation. Venuti (2018) argues that translators must negotiate between preserving features of the source language and producing fluent target texts. Excessive adherence to Arabic grammatical structures may preserve foreign characteristics but reduce readability, while extensive adaptation may weaken the stylistic identity of the original. Therefore, translators must achieve a balance between linguistic authenticity and accessibility.

Arabic–English translation provides a clear example of these theoretical challenges because the two languages differ significantly in their grammatical organisation. Arabic permits flexible word order, relies heavily on morphological marking, expresses grammatical gender systematically, and often uses coordination to establish textual relationships. English, in contrast, depends more strongly on fixed syntactic structures, limited inflection, and punctuation to organise information. As a result, literal grammatical correspondence is frequently impossible, requiring translators to employ shifts such as omission, addition, substitution, transposition, and restructuring.

Although previous studies have examined specific grammatical issues in Arabic–English translation, including passive constructions, word order, gender agreement, cohesion, and punctuation, many have focused primarily on describing differences between the two linguistic systems. Fewer studies have investigated how translators manage these differences within authentic literary contexts by integrating theories of equivalence with functional approaches.

The present study addresses this gap by combining insights from translation equivalence theory, systemic functional linguistics, and functionalist approaches to develop a comprehensive framework for analysing grammatical constraints in Arabic–English literary translation. It views grammatical shifts not as signs of translation loss but as strategic decisions that enable translators to preserve meaning, style, and aesthetic value despite structural differences between the two languages. Accordingly, the following sections examine five major areas of grammatical divergence—passive voice, word order, gender, textual connectivity, and punctuation—and explore how translators employ grammatical strategies to achieve functional and literary equivalence.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a **qualitative, descriptive, and comparative research design** to examine the grammatical constraints involved in translating Arabic literary texts into English. A qualitative approach is appropriate for translation studies because it enables detailed investigation of linguistic phenomena within their textual, cultural, and communicative contexts. Rather than focusing on statistical measurement, the study explores how translators manage grammatical differences between Arabic and English and how their choices contribute to effective translation.

The research combines **Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS)**, following Toury (2012), with comparative linguistic analysis. DTS allows translation to be examined as an actual practice rather than according to predetermined rules, while comparative analysis identifies structural differences between Arabic and English and evaluates their impact on translation strategies. This combination provides a framework for analysing not only grammatical differences but also the functional effectiveness of translators' decisions.

3.2 Research Corpus

The study analyses selected examples from published Arabic literary works and their English translations. Literary texts were chosen because they present complex grammatical and stylistic challenges, as their

meaning depends not only on content but also on narrative structure, rhetorical features, and stylistic choices.

The analysis focuses on five major areas of grammatical divergence between Arabic and English:

- passive voice;
- word order;
- grammatical gender;
- textual connectivity;
- punctuation.

These areas were selected because they represent frequent sources of difficulty in Arabic–English literary translation and often require translators to apply grammatical shifts to achieve natural and effective target texts.

3.3 Analytical Framework

The study is based on the concept of **functional equivalence**, which views successful translation as the preservation of meaning, communicative purpose, stylistic effect, and reader response rather than the mechanical reproduction of grammatical structures. While formal correspondence is acknowledged as significant, the study argues that literary translation often requires structural adaptation to achieve functional accuracy.

The analytical framework draws on several major theories of translation, including Nida's (1964) distinction between formal and dynamic equivalence, Catford's (1965) theory of translation shifts, Baker's (2018) concept of grammatical equivalence, Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014), and functionalist approaches developed by Vermeer and Nord. Together, these perspectives provide a comprehensive basis for analysing how translators overcome grammatical differences while maintaining textual coherence and literary quality.

3.4 Analytical Procedure

The analysis was conducted through four main stages. First, Arabic literary passages were examined to identify grammatical structures that differ significantly from English equivalents, with particular attention to syntax, verbal systems, gender marking, cohesion, and punctuation.

Second, the corresponding English translations were analysed to identify the strategies used by translators, including restructuring, omission, addition, substitution, transposition, and modulation.

Third, translation choices were evaluated according to their contribution to functional equivalence. The assessment considered whether the translated texts successfully preserved semantic meaning, stylistic effect, narrative coherence, and communicative intention rather than merely maintaining grammatical similarity.

Finally, the findings were compared and synthesised to identify general patterns of grammatical adaptation in Arabic–English literary translation and to develop practical recommendations for translators.

3.5 Reliability and Validity

Although qualitative research does not rely on statistical reliability, methodological consistency and analytical transparency are essential. The credibility of this study is supported by the systematic use of established translation theories and authentic literary examples. The analysis is based on recognised theoretical principles rather than individual preference.

The study also applies theoretical triangulation by combining linguistic, functional, and discourse-based perspectives. This approach strengthens the validity of the findings by providing a broader understanding of grammatical choices and their relationship to meaning, cohesion, and literary style.

3.6 Scope and Limitations

This research focuses specifically on grammatical constraints in Arabic–English literary translation. It does not examine broader issues such as lexical choices, cultural representation, or ideological aspects except where they directly relate to grammatical structures. The selected examples illustrate common translation challenges but do not represent all possible differences between Arabic and English.

Despite these limitations, the study provides a systematic examination of major grammatical problems affecting Arabic–English literary translation and proposes practical strategies for addressing them. By

integrating traditional theories of equivalence with contemporary functional approaches, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of grammatical decision-making in literary translation.

4. Grammatical Constraints in Arabic–English Literary Translation

A thorough understanding of the source text, together with a strong command of the linguistic resources of the target language, enables translators to produce accurate and stylistically appropriate translations. Successful translation is not achieved through lexical substitution alone but through the effective transfer of meaning in a form that conforms to the grammatical and communicative conventions of the target language. Translators who rely excessively on source-language structures often produce translations that are grammatically acceptable yet stylistically unnatural.

Translation therefore involves much more than matching dictionary equivalents. Translators must construct new linguistic forms in the target language that convey the concepts expressed in the source language (SL). This requires not only identifying appropriate lexical correspondences but also organising them according to the grammatical and syntactic conventions of the target language (TL). For example, English passive constructions are frequently translated into Arabic using active structures when this better reflects Arabic discourse norms and preserves the communicative effect of the original.

Since no two languages are identical, either in the meanings assigned to linguistic forms or in the ways these forms are organised into phrases and sentences, absolute correspondence between languages is unattainable. Consequently, translators must make whatever grammatical adjustments are necessary to produce natural and effective target-language texts. Such grammatical shifts should not be viewed as translation loss but as essential strategies for achieving functional equivalence.

As Nida (1964, p. 193) observes, correspondences and contrasts between the source and target languages may be classified into two broad categories:

1. Structural correspondences, extending from phrase level to discourse; and
2. Dynamic correspondences, which concern the communicative load carried by linguistic units.

The present discussion focuses primarily on structural correspondences. As demonstrated throughout this study, communicative purposes in both Arabic and English are realised through language-specific grammatical patterns. An understanding of these patterns enables translators to overcome grammatical constraints and transfer meaning systematically from one language to another.

Neubert and Shreve (1992, pp. 44–45) emphasise that translation extends far beyond the processing of words and grammatical structures:

Authors, translators, and readers process more than words and grammatical structures. They engage in a more encompassing information processing activity which includes the processing of words and grammatical structures. This higher level of processing includes the synthesis of meaning structures, the factoring of pragmatic constraints, and the global conditioning of the linguistic surface of the text. Linguistic system, pragmatic constraints, world knowledge, and meaning systems all converge in the act of translation. Translation is a synthetic process in which the translator dynamically matches semantic, syntactic, textual, and pragmatic fields to create a unitary whole, the L2 text.

This perspective highlights an important principle of translation. Some translators make the mistake of reproducing target-language constructions that mirror the semantic organisation of the source language too closely. Effective translation, however, requires a comprehensive understanding of the source text before its linguistic elements are analysed. Comprehension begins with the text as a whole and proceeds through progressively smaller units—from discourse and paragraphs to sentences, phrases, and individual lexical items.

The translation process then proceeds in the opposite direction. Having analysed the source text, the translator reconstructs meaning in the target language by moving from lexical choices to phrases, sentences, and finally to a coherent discourse. Translation therefore combines top-down analysis with bottom-up reconstruction, ensuring that both local grammatical relationships and global textual coherence are preserved.

Careful examination of the source text is essential because translation involves both understanding and reproducing meaning. Since the translator functions simultaneously as the receiver of the source-language message and the producer of the target-language text, successful translation depends upon accurate

linguistic and contextual interpretation. Grammar plays a central role in this process. It provides the rules governing the organisation of words and phrases and specifies the grammatical information that must be made explicit in communication.

McEldowney (1990, p. 1) explains the function of grammatical items as follows:

Their function is not to carry meaning but to mark the referent of each content item and to indicate the relationship between the content items of any piece of discourse.

Similarly, McEldowney (1990, p. 5) argues that:

Grammatical items provide what is essentially a supportive means of communicating information that comes directly from content items.

These observations illustrate that grammar primarily organises meaning rather than generating it. This principle can be demonstrated through the English greeting *How do you do?* A literal translation based solely on lexical and grammatical correspondence, such as *كيف تعمل؟*, is clearly inappropriate because it ignores the communicative function of the expression. In formal introductions, the phrase functions as a conventional greeting rather than a genuine question. Its functional equivalent in Modern Standard Arabic is therefore *أهلاً وسهلاً*, which reproduces the intended communicative effect rather than the surface linguistic form.

McEldowney (1990) further emphasises that grammar should be viewed as a tool for interpreting meaning rather than as meaning itself. She cautions against analysing grammatical structures in isolation from their communicative context. Although grammatical items contribute relatively little lexical meaning, they organise and clarify relationships between content words.

For example:

Ali student. He arrive Manchester University last week. He studies English. He Jordanian.

Despite the absence of many grammatical markers, the intended message remains largely comprehensible because the lexical items convey the essential information. By contrast, if only grammatical items remain while lexical content is removed, meaningful communication becomes impossible:

...is a... ...is...ed... ...is...ing... ...is...

These examples demonstrate that successful communication depends primarily on content words, while grammar provides the structural framework that organises those meanings into coherent discourse. Consequently, language should be interpreted as an integrated communicative system in which lexical and grammatical elements function together within context.

The present section examines grammatical constraints affecting translation equivalence between Arabic and English. Given the considerable number and complexity of syntactic differences between the two languages, the discussion focuses on several representative grammatical phenomena: word order, passive constructions, grammatical gender, textual connectivity, and punctuation. Particular attention is given to constituent order, especially the distinction between verbal and nominal sentence structures in Arabic. Although these grammatical categories have traditionally been examined separately, they are treated here as interconnected discourse resources that influence translation quality. Comparing these features across Arabic and English provides valuable insight into the grammatical adjustments required to achieve functional equivalence while preserving the communicative and stylistic characteristics of literary texts.

4.1 Passive Voice: Functional Equivalence Beyond Structural Correspondence

Passive voice represents one of the most significant grammatical challenges in Arabic–English literary translation because the two languages differ considerably in both the frequency of passive constructions and their communicative functions. Although Arabic and English both possess grammatical mechanisms for expressing passive meaning, their use is governed by different stylistic conventions and discourse preferences. Consequently, translators cannot rely on formal correspondence alone but must determine how passive meaning can be conveyed naturally and effectively in the target language while preserving the communicative and literary effect of the source text.

Voice is traditionally defined as the grammatical relationship between a verb and its subject. Quirk (1972, p. 801) describes voice as "a grammatical category which makes it possible to view the action of a sentence in two ways, without change in the facts reported." In active clauses, the subject functions as the agent performing the action, whereas in passive clauses the subject represents the affected participant, and the agent may or may not be expressed.

English makes extensive use of passive constructions in academic, legal, journalistic, and literary discourse. Passive voice enables writers to foreground actions, suppress or background agents, maintain thematic continuity, and shift attention from actors to events or their consequences. In literary texts, passive constructions may influence narrative perspective by directing readers' attention towards the event itself rather than its performer.

Arabic likewise possesses a grammatical category of voice but generally favours active constructions, particularly when the agent is known or contextually significant. Although Classical and Modern Standard Arabic employ morphological passive forms, active constructions occur far more frequently in ordinary discourse. Consequently, many English passive constructions are translated naturally into Arabic using active clauses, while certain Arabic passive forms require restructuring when rendered into English.

These differences illustrate one of the central principles of functional translation theory. Grammatical similarity does not necessarily produce communicative equivalence. Catford's (1965) theory of translation shifts explains that structural modification is frequently unavoidable because grammatical categories perform different communicative functions across languages. Likewise, Nida's (1964) concept of dynamic equivalence argues that translators should prioritise equivalent reader response rather than preserve grammatical form mechanically. Baker (2018) similarly maintains that grammatical equivalence should be understood in functional rather than formal terms because languages differ not only in their grammatical systems but also in the communicative purposes served by particular grammatical choices.

The distinction between English and Arabic becomes particularly evident in the treatment of agentive and agentless passive constructions. English employs both types extensively. For example:

Members of British Muslims were arrested in America for the peaceful expression of their faith by the FBI. (agentive)

Members of British Muslims were arrested in America for the peaceful expression of their faith. (agentless)

Arabic, by contrast, overwhelmingly prefers the agentless passive. This preference is illustrated in the Qur'anic example:

يُرْسَلُ عَلَيْكُمَا شَوْابٌ مِّنْ نَّارٍ وَنُحَاسٌ فَلَا تَنْتَصِرَانِ
(Qur'an 55:35)

On you will be sent a flame of fire and smoke, and you will have no defence. (Ali, 1983)

The English agentive passive has no direct formal equivalent in Arabic and therefore usually requires grammatical restructuring during translation. In English, the agentive passive commonly delays heavy constituents and places the affected participant in subject position to achieve thematic prominence. Agentless passive constructions, meanwhile, allow speakers or writers to omit agents that are unknown, irrelevant, obvious, deliberately concealed, or pragmatically unnecessary. As Kilby (1984, pp. 66–67) observes, agent omission may result from several discourse motivations, including authorial modesty, avoidance of responsibility, diffuse agency, or emphasis on the state of affairs rather than its cause.

Traditional Arabic grammar similarly distinguishes between active and passive voice. The active form is termed المعلوم ("the known"), indicating that the agent is identified, whereas the passive is termed المجهول ("the unknown"), reflecting the omission or absence of the agent (Wright, 1896). Unlike English, Arabic forms the passive primarily through internal vowel changes rather than auxiliary verbs. For example:

وَجِيءَ يَوْمَئِذٍ بِجَهَنَّمَ
(Qur'an 89:23)

And Hell, that Day, will be brought forth. (Ali, 1983)

Arabic also allows agency to remain unspecified through either personal expressions such as قال قائل ("someone said") or impersonal passive forms such as قيل ("it was said"), both of which contribute to narrative cohesion while suppressing explicit agency.

Modern Standard Arabic employs passive constructions more frequently than Classical Arabic, particularly in journalistic and literary writing, where emphasis falls upon the action and its affected participant rather than upon the performer. Nevertheless, active constructions remain the unmarked choice whenever the agent contributes directly to the communicative purpose of the text.

These linguistic differences become particularly significant in literary translation. Consider the following example:

سُرِقَتِ الحَقِيْبَةُ أَتْنَاءَ اللَّيْلِ.

A literal translation:

The bag was stolen during the night.

Here, both languages naturally employ the passive because the identity of the agent is irrelevant. The passive successfully foregrounds the event while preserving both semantic meaning and narrative emphasis.

However, passive constructions do not always perform identical discourse functions across the two languages. Consider:

أَغْلَقَ الْبَابُ ثُمَّ عَادَتِ الْمَرْأَةُ إِلَى مَقْعِهَا.

A literal rendering,

The door was closed, then the woman returned to her seat,

is grammatically correct but stylistically detached if the context clearly identifies the woman as the person who closed the door. A more natural translation would be:

She closed the door and returned to her seat.

Although the grammatical structure changes from passive to active, the communicative function and narrative flow are preserved more effectively.

Conversely, Arabic active constructions sometimes require passive expression in English. For example:

يَقُولُ النَّاسُ إِنَّ الْمَدِيْنَةَ هُجِرَتْ مِنْذُ سَنَوَاتٍ.

Rather than translating literally as

People say that the city abandoned years ago,

English naturally prefers

The city is said to have been abandoned many years ago.

The English passive conforms to target-language discourse conventions while preserving the informational focus of the Arabic text.

These examples demonstrate that passive voice contributes not only to sentence structure but also to thematic progression, information structure, and narrative rhythm. Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) argue that grammatical choices shape thematic development throughout discourse. In literary texts, passive constructions may create ambiguity, conceal agency, heighten dramatic tension, or guide readers' interpretation of events. Consequently, translators should neither preserve passive constructions mechanically nor replace them automatically with active clauses. Each instance must be evaluated according to its communicative function within the wider discourse.

From a translation perspective, the primary objective is not grammatical correspondence but functional equivalence. Larson (1984, p. 20) emphasises that "grammatical choices in translation must be based on the function of the grammatical construction in the receptor language, not on a literal rendition of a source-language form." Similarly, Beekman and Callow (1974, p. 27) argue that translators should select grammatical forms that function naturally in the target language rather than reproducing those of the source text.

Accordingly, English passive constructions such as He was received by the foreign minister are more naturally rendered in Arabic as استقبله وزير الخارجية rather than through cumbersome passive expressions employing من قبل. Such grammatical shifts should not be regarded as translation loss but as evidence of translator competence in adapting linguistic structures to the communicative conventions of the target language.

Overall, passive voice in Arabic–English literary translation should be understood as a flexible discourse resource rather than a fixed grammatical category. Successful translation depends on reproducing the communicative value of passive constructions—their contribution to thematic focus, narrative perspective, information structure, and stylistic effect—rather than their formal grammatical appearance. Functional equivalence is therefore achieved through informed grammatical adaptation that preserves literary meaning while conforming to the linguistic norms of the target language.

4.2 Word Order: Information Structure and Literary Style

Word order constitutes one of the most significant grammatical differences between Arabic and English and represents one of the most persistent challenges in Arabic–English literary translation. Differences in sentence organisation influence not only grammatical accuracy but also thematic development, information structure, narrative rhythm, stylistic emphasis, and reader interpretation. Consequently,

translators frequently need to reorganise sentence structures rather than reproduce the original sequence of constituents. Such restructuring should not be regarded as a loss of fidelity but as a strategy for achieving functional and stylistic equivalence within the conventions of the target language.

Word order may be defined as "the sequential arrangement of words in a language" (Crystal, 1980, p. 384). Crystal further observes that English is among the languages that rely heavily on word order to express grammatical relationships because of its relatively limited inflectional system. Consequently, constituent order plays a central role in identifying subjects, verbs, and objects, and deviations from the canonical pattern usually serve specific stylistic or pragmatic purposes.

English generally follows a relatively fixed **Subject–Verb–Object (SVO)** pattern. Although inversion, topicalisation, and fronting are possible, they are marked structures employed to create emphasis or achieve particular rhetorical effects. Arabic, by contrast, permits considerably greater flexibility in constituent order. Classical Arabic traditionally favours the **Verb–Subject–Object (VSO)** pattern, whereas Modern Standard Arabic employs both VSO and SVO according to discourse function, emphasis, and stylistic preference. Arabic also makes extensive use of nominal sentences, which begin with a noun phrase and characteristically omit the present-tense copular verb. This flexibility allows Arabic writers to foreground information, create rhetorical emphasis, and manipulate narrative perspective more freely than English.

Menacere (1995) observes that whereas English possesses a relatively fixed, pragmatically controlled word order, Arabic displays much greater flexibility in the distribution and movement of sentence constituents. Likewise, Barnwell (1980) argues that each language possesses its own accepted patterns for organising meaningful utterances and that signals such as constituent order, grammatical words, and intonation contribute directly to the communication of meaning. These observations support the functional view advanced by Halliday (1978), who regards grammatical structure as a system of communicative choices rather than a purely formal arrangement.

From a translation perspective, these structural differences demonstrate the limitations of formal correspondence. Catford's (1965) concept of **structure shifts** explains that translators frequently modify constituent order because equivalent communicative functions are realised through different grammatical patterns in different languages. Similarly, Baker (2018) argues that grammatical equivalence cannot be evaluated solely in terms of structural similarity since languages organise information according to their own grammatical systems. Consequently, preserving Arabic word order mechanically often results in English sentences that appear awkward, ambiguous, or stylistically unnatural.

Consider the following example:

دَخَلَ الْغُرْفَةَ رَجُلٌ عَجُوزٌ يَحْمِلُ مَصْبَاحاً صَغِيراً.

A literal translation would be:

Entered the room an old man carrying a small lamp.

Although grammatically interpretable, this sentence violates normal English syntactic expectations and immediately signals foreignness. A more natural translation is:

An old man carrying a small lamp entered the room.

The grammatical restructuring involves no loss of meaning. Instead, it conforms to English discourse conventions while preserving the narrative sequence and stylistic effect established by the original. This

example illustrates that functional equivalence frequently requires grammatical adaptation rather than formal imitation.

Arabic nominal sentences present a similar challenge. Because Arabic commonly omits the present-tense copular verb, translators must introduce grammatical elements that English requires.

For example:

المدينة هادئة في هذا الوقت من الليل.

A literal rendering,

The city quiet at this time of night,

is grammatically incomplete in English. The natural translation is:

The city is quiet at this time of night.

Although the English version introduces the copular verb *is*, which has no overt equivalent in the Arabic sentence, the communicative meaning remains unchanged. Such obligatory grammatical additions demonstrate that equivalence often depends on preserving communicative value rather than formal structure.

The differences become even more apparent when translating between sentence types. English generally favours nominal sentence structures beginning with the subject, whereas Arabic has traditionally shown a preference for verbal sentences beginning with the verb. For example:

جاء الربيع

is literally:

Has come spring.

However, natural English requires:

Spring has come.

Likewise,

أفادني كلامك

is more naturally translated as:

What you said was useful to me.

These examples illustrate that Arabic constituent order cannot simply be imposed on English because each language organises information according to its own grammatical conventions.

Bakir (1980) further notes that Arabic permits several constituent patterns in addition to the canonical VSO order, including VOS and SVO constructions. This flexibility is made possible by Arabic's rich inflectional morphology, which marks grammatical relationships through case endings and agreement

rather than relying primarily on constituent order. English, lacking comparable inflectional marking, depends much more heavily on word order to indicate syntactic relationships. Consequently, translators must be prepared to reorganise constituent order systematically when moving between the two languages.

Word order is also closely associated with information structure. Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) distinguish between **theme**, the point of departure of a message, and **rheme**, which presents new information. Arabic literary prose frequently places verbs, adverbials, or objects in thematic position to create dramatic progression or rhetorical emphasis, whereas English generally prefers the grammatical subject to occupy clause-initial position unless marked emphasis is intended.

Consider the following example:

في تلك الليلة اختفى الطفل دون أن يترك أثراً

A literal translation,

On that night disappeared the child without leaving a trace,

appears unnecessarily marked in contemporary English. More natural translations include:

The child disappeared that night without leaving a trace.

or, where temporal emphasis is important,

That night, the child disappeared without leaving a trace.

Both versions preserve the communicative emphasis while adapting the sentence to English information structure.

Arabic literary discourse frequently employs fronting, inversion, and constituent movement to express emphasis, contrast, emotional intensity, or topicalisation. English possesses comparable rhetorical devices, but they occur much less frequently and are subject to stricter stylistic constraints. Translators must therefore distinguish between marked structures that contribute essential literary meaning and those that simply reflect ordinary Arabic discourse conventions. Excessive preservation of Arabic word order may produce unnatural English prose, whereas excessive restructuring risks weakening the stylistic character of the original.

Modern Arabic has also witnessed increasing use of nominal sentence structures, particularly in journalistic and expository writing (Beeston, 1970). This development has narrowed some of the structural differences between Arabic and English, although important distinctions remain, especially in literary discourse where constituent order continues to function as a powerful stylistic resource.

Recent developments in discourse analysis and cognitive linguistics further reinforce the importance of information structure in translation. Readers process information incrementally according to the conventions of their native language. When translated texts preserve unfamiliar constituent patterns unnecessarily, cognitive processing becomes more demanding, reducing readability and literary engagement. Effective translators therefore reorganise grammatical structures to facilitate natural comprehension while preserving narrative intention and stylistic effect.

Ultimately, word order should be understood not merely as a syntactic arrangement but as a discourse resource that shapes narrative voice, thematic progression, pacing, and reader interpretation. Successful Arabic–English literary translation therefore depends upon preserving the communicative function of

constituent order rather than its exact grammatical configuration. Through strategies such as restructuring, transposition, thematic adjustment, and information reorganisation, translators can maintain both the semantic content and the literary qualities of the source text while producing natural and stylistically effective English prose.

4.3 Grammatical Gender: Negotiating Linguistic and Referential Equivalence

Grammatical gender represents one of the most distinctive structural differences between Arabic and English and constitutes a recurring challenge in Arabic–English literary translation. Gender may be defined as a grammatical category according to which nouns and pronouns are classified into different classes requiring agreement with other elements of the sentence, such as adjectives, determiners, verbs, and pronouns. As Baker (2018) explains, grammatical gender is "a grammatical distinction according to which a noun or a pronoun is classified as either masculine or feminine in some languages." While Arabic systematically encodes gender throughout its grammatical system, English relies primarily on natural gender and expresses gender distinctions mainly through personal pronouns and a limited number of lexical items. Consequently, translators frequently encounter situations in which Arabic explicitly marks grammatical information that English leaves unexpressed, or where English deliberately preserves ambiguity that Arabic grammar requires to be specified.

In Arabic, grammatical gender is an integral component of sentence structure. Almost every noun is classified as either masculine or feminine, and this distinction governs agreement across verbs, adjectives, pronouns, demonstratives, relative pronouns, and numerals. These grammatical relationships provide important information concerning reference, cohesion, and interpretation. In literary discourse, gender marking may further contribute to characterisation, interpersonal relationships, narrative perspective, and stylistic nuance.

English, by contrast, has largely abandoned grammatical gender as a productive grammatical category. Most nouns are grammatically neutral, and gender distinctions are normally expressed only where they are semantically relevant, principally through personal pronouns such as *he*, *she*, and *they*. Lexical items such as *teacher*, *doctor*, *friend*, *parent*, *child*, and *secretary* generally convey no grammatical information concerning the sex of the referent unless additional contextual information is supplied. This asymmetry creates recurrent translation difficulties because Arabic often requires explicit grammatical distinctions where English remains deliberately neutral.

The complexity of gender in Arabic extends beyond nouns and pronouns. Determiners, adjectives, verbs, and numerals usually agree with the noun in both gender and number, making gender one of the most pervasive grammatical categories in the language. As Baker (2018) observes, grammatical equivalence cannot be achieved simply by matching grammatical categories across languages because languages organise meaning through different grammatical systems. The absence of an equivalent grammatical distinction does not necessarily imply a loss of communicative meaning. Rather, translators must determine whether a particular gender distinction contributes to the semantic, pragmatic, or stylistic function of the text before deciding whether it should be retained, neutralised, or compensated elsewhere in the translation.

For example:

دخلتِ المعلمةُ الفصلَ وابتسمتُ للتلاميذ.

A literal translation would be:

The female teacher entered the classroom and smiled at the students.

Although grammatically accurate, the adjective *female* is unnecessary in ordinary English because the noun *teacher* is inherently gender-neutral. A more natural translation is:

The teacher entered the classroom and smiled at the students.

Here, grammatical gender has been neutralised because it does not contribute significantly to the communicative purpose of the sentence. The translator sacrifices formal correspondence in favour of naturalness and stylistic appropriateness.

The reverse problem frequently occurs when translating from English into Arabic. English often employs gender-neutral nouns and pronouns whose interpretation depends entirely upon context. Consider the sentence:

The child was sleeping peacefully.

Arabic, however, requires the translator to choose between:

كان الطفلُ نائماً بهدوءٍ.

or

كانت الطفلةُ نائمةً بهدوءٍ.

The English sentence deliberately leaves the child's sex unspecified, whereas Arabic grammar requires explicit gender agreement. Translation therefore becomes an interpretative process rather than a simple act of grammatical substitution. The translator must infer gender from contextual evidence or adopt alternative strategies where such evidence is unavailable.

Similar difficulties arise with English pronouns such as you, it, parent, and child. English you does not distinguish between masculine and feminine forms or between singular and plural reference, whereas Arabic possesses separate forms for masculine, feminine, singular, dual, and plural addressees. Likewise, English commonly employs it when referring to infants or where biological sex is considered irrelevant, while Arabic requires either masculine or feminine agreement. Such differences require translators to consider pragmatic context as well as grammatical structure.

Another area in which grammatical gender interacts with cultural convention concerns honorific forms. Arabic frequently employs grammatically plural pronouns and expressions of respect such as **حضرتكم**, **معاليكم**, **فخامتكم**, and **سموكم**, although they refer to a single individual. Similarly, expressions such as **نحن جلالة** employ the plural for ceremonial purposes. English generally conveys comparable meanings lexically through expressions such as Your Excellency, Your Highness, or Your Honour rather than through grammatical number. Consequently, translators must reproduce the pragmatic force of these expressions rather than their grammatical form.

Gender also contributes significantly to textual cohesion. Halliday and Hasan (1976) demonstrate that cohesive ties enable readers to establish referential relationships across a text. Arabic gender agreement frequently strengthens cohesion by identifying participants unambiguously through systematic agreement patterns. English, by contrast, relies more heavily on contextual inference, lexical repetition, and pronominal reference. Translators must therefore determine how equivalent referential clarity can be maintained using the grammatical resources available in English.

The translation of literary dialogue further illustrates the complexity of grammatical gender. Gender distinctions may reveal aspects of social identity, interpersonal relationships, and cultural expectations. Excessive preservation of Arabic gender markers often produces unnatural English dialogue, whereas excessive neutralisation may weaken characterisation or obscure culturally significant relationships.

Translators must therefore distinguish between obligatory grammatical distinctions and those that contribute directly to literary interpretation.

Functional translation theory offers a more satisfactory solution to these challenges than approaches based solely on formal correspondence. Grammatical gender should be regarded as a communicative resource rather than a fixed grammatical form. Successful literary translation does not require preserving every gender distinction encoded in Arabic; rather, it requires reproducing the referential clarity, interpersonal relationships, stylistic effects, and narrative functions that gender serves within the source text. Functional equivalence therefore permits grammatical neutralisation where English conventions favour implicit reference while encouraging strategic compensation whenever gender contributes directly to literary meaning.

Ultimately, the differences between Arabic and English gender systems illustrate a broader principle underlying literary translation. Grammatical categories derive their significance not from their formal characteristics but from the communicative functions they perform within discourse. Translators who recognise this principle are better equipped to negotiate the structural differences between the two languages while preserving the semantic content, stylistic identity, and literary integrity of the original text.

4.4 Connectivity: Cohesion and Coherence in Arabic–English Literary Translation

Textual connectivity, or cohesion, plays a central role in literary translation because it enables readers to interpret individual sentences as components of a coherent and meaningful whole. Whereas grammar governs the internal organisation of sentences, cohesive devices establish semantic and logical relationships between clauses, sentences, and paragraphs, thereby contributing to textual unity, narrative progression, and stylistic coherence. As Halliday and Hasan (1976) argue, a text is fundamentally "a semantic unit" rather than merely a sequence of grammatical structures. Similarly, Newmark (1981) observes that linguistic analysis beyond the sentence is essential in translation because relationships between sentences are expressed through punctuation, demonstratives, deixis, reference, conjunctions, lexical repetition, and other cohesive mechanisms.

From a translation perspective, the sentence may be regarded as the minimal unit of translation operating within the larger communicative unit of the complete text. Consequently, literary translation requires translators not only to render individual sentences accurately but also to reconstruct the cohesive relationships that create textual coherence. Since languages differ in the ways they organise discourse, translators frequently need to adapt cohesive patterns to conform to the stylistic conventions of the target language while preserving the communicative function of the source text.

Arabic and English differ considerably in their approaches to textual organisation. Arabic literary prose frequently employs explicit coordination, lexical repetition, parallel structures, and extended sentence patterns to create continuity and rhetorical rhythm. English, by contrast, generally favours shorter sentence structures, greater syntactic variation, lexical economy, and a higher degree of implicit cohesion. Consequently, the restrictions governing the connection of sentences in one language do not necessarily coincide with those of the other, making textual connectivity one of the most significant grammatical challenges in Arabic–English literary translation.

Halliday and Hasan (1976) identify several major cohesive mechanisms, including reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical cohesion. These devices guide readers in establishing relationships across a text and therefore contribute directly to meaning construction. From a functional perspective, translators should preserve the communicative role performed by cohesive devices rather than reproduce their grammatical forms mechanically.

One of the clearest differences concerns the Arabic conjunction **و** (wa, "and"). Arabic narrative commonly links successive events through repeated coordination, creating a continuous and flowing

narrative rhythm. English, however, generally avoids excessive repetition of conjunctions because it is often perceived as stylistically cumbersome.

For example:

دخل الرجل البيت، وفتح النافذة، وجلس بصمت، وأشعل سيجارة.

A literal translation would be:

The man entered the house, and opened the window, and sat silently, and lit a cigarette.

Although grammatically acceptable, this version sounds repetitive and unnatural in English. A more idiomatic translation is:

The man entered the house, opened the window, sat silently, and lit a cigarette.

Here, repeated conjunctions are omitted while the chronological sequence and communicative function of the original are fully preserved. The translator therefore achieves functional cohesion rather than formal correspondence.

A similar phenomenon appears in longer stretches of literary discourse. Consider the following passage:

ودخلت المحل امرأة في هيئة الخدم ممسكة بيدها بنتا صغيرة ثم اتجهت إلى ريري تحدثها باهتمام على حين وثبتت الصغيرة إلى حجر ريري وراحت تعبت بعقد بطوق عنقها بألفه واطمننان.

Translated by Allen in *Autumn Quail* as:

A woman in servant's clothes came into the place leading a little girl by the right hand. She went and spoke seriously to Riri. Meanwhile, the little girl jumped up on to Riri's lap and started playing lovingly and trustingly with the necklace she was wearing.

The Arabic original links the narrative primarily through the conjunctions **و** (and) and **ثم** (then), whereas the English translation relies on sentence division, punctuation, and lexical transitions instead. Although the grammatical structure changes substantially, the narrative sequence, coherence, and stylistic effect remain intact. This illustrates that cohesive equivalence depends on discourse function rather than identical grammatical markers.

The same principle applies to lexical repetition. Arabic literary texts frequently repeat lexical items to reinforce emphasis, emotional intensity, or rhetorical effect, whereas English generally prefers lexical variation.

For example:

كان الخوف يملأ قلبه، وكان الخوف يسيطر على أفكاره.

A literal translation is:

Fear filled his heart, and fear controlled his thoughts.

A more natural literary rendering would be:

Fear filled his heart and consumed his thoughts.

Here, repetition is reduced while preserving the emotional force of the original. As Baker (2018) observes, translators frequently replace formal repetition with lexical variation because English literary style tends to avoid unnecessary repetition unless it serves a deliberate rhetorical purpose.

Reference systems likewise differ across the two languages. Arabic commonly repeats nouns where English normally employs pronouns or ellipsis once the referent has been established.

For example:

وصل أحمد إلى المنزل، ثم دخل أحمد غرفته.

A literal translation:

Ahmed arrived home, then Ahmed entered his room.

Natural English prefers:

Ahmed arrived home and then entered his room.

or

Ahmed arrived home. He then entered his room.

English readers generally expect pronouns once reference is established, whereas Arabic tolerates or even prefers lexical repetition for clarity and cohesion. Translators must therefore adapt reference patterns according to target-language conventions.

Ellipsis provides another illustration of differing cohesive preferences. English frequently omits information recoverable from context, whereas Arabic often expresses such information explicitly.

For example:

هل قرأت الرواية؟ نعم، قرأتها.

A natural English translation is:

Have you read the novel?

Yes, I have.

The object is omitted because it is contextually recoverable. Such grammatical reduction reflects normal English discourse organisation and should not be regarded as a loss of meaning.

Differences in textual segmentation further illustrate contrasting discourse conventions. Arabic literary prose often employs longer sentences connected through coordination and subordination, while English tends to divide information into shorter syntactic units. For example:

انتظر حتى فات الليل منتصفه وخلا الكورنيش أو كاد وولى الجالسون.

A natural English rendering is:

He waited until it was midnight. The Corniche was empty, or almost so. The people who had been sitting there gradually left.

Although the English version introduces additional sentence boundaries, it preserves the sequence of events while improving readability and stylistic naturalness.

These examples demonstrate that connectivity is governed by language-specific discourse conventions rather than universal grammatical rules. Cohesive devices are not simply transferred from one language to another; instead, they are reconstructed during the translation process according to the communicative norms of the target language. Excessive preservation of Arabic coordination, repetition, and explicit reference may produce awkward English prose, whereas excessive adaptation may diminish the rhetorical identity of the source text. The translator must therefore balance textual fidelity with target-language readability through informed grammatical and stylistic choices.

From a functional perspective, textual cohesion should be viewed as a communicative resource rather than a collection of formal grammatical markers. Successful literary translation depends not on reproducing conjunctions, repetitions, or sentence boundaries mechanically, but on preserving the discourse functions they perform within the text. By systematically adapting coordination, reference, lexical repetition, ellipsis, punctuation, and paragraph organisation, translators can maintain coherence, narrative flow, and literary style while producing translations that read naturally for target-language audiences. This functional approach reflects the broader principle advanced throughout this study: translation equivalence is achieved through the preservation of communicative function rather than structural correspondence alone.

4.5 Punctuation: Beyond Mechanical Marks

Punctuation is an essential component of written language and plays a significant role in literary translation. Far from being a purely mechanical system of visual symbols, punctuation contributes to the organisation of discourse, the expression of meaning, and the interpretation of literary texts. As Meyer (1987) observes, the functions of punctuation arise from both stylistic and perceptual requirements, although perceptual considerations are ultimately more fundamental because they assist readers in processing written language. Stylistically, punctuation allows writers to create rhythm, emphasis, suspense, and other rhetorical effects in much the same way that intonation, stress, and gesture function in spoken communication.

Hall (1998) and Nunberg (1990) similarly describe punctuation as a communicative resource that enhances the clarity and effectiveness of written texts, while Smith (1983) emphasises its role in constructing meaning by dividing discourse into manageable units such as sentences and clauses. Consequently, punctuation should be regarded as an integral part of discourse organisation rather than merely a set of orthographic conventions. In literary translation, punctuation contributes directly to narrative pace, dialogue structure, emotional intensity, and reader interpretation. Translators must therefore evaluate punctuation according to the communicative functions it performs rather than reproduce punctuation marks mechanically.

Although Arabic and English share many punctuation symbols, important differences exist in their conventions governing sentence structure, paragraph organisation, dialogue presentation, and the use of commas and semicolons. Historically, Arabic writing relied far less on punctuation than English. As Wickens (1980) notes, Arabic developed alternative linguistic devices to perform many of the organisational functions that punctuation fulfils in European languages. Similarly, Holes (1995) observes that until the late nineteenth century much Arabic writing contained little or no punctuation, and even

today punctuation practices remain more flexible and less standardised than those of English, particularly in literary writing.

Instead of relying heavily on punctuation, Arabic frequently employs coordinating conjunctions, especially **و** (wa, "and"), together with other connective particles to indicate relationships between clauses and sentences. Consider the following example:

إمداد الريف بالنور الكهربائي يحقق فوائد كثيرة فهو يساعد على حفظ الأمن ويرفع مستوى المعيشة في القرى ويشجع على إنشاء المصانع الريفية ويحد من هجرة الريفيين إلى المدن.

A natural English translation is:

Providing the countryside with electricity brings many benefits. It helps maintain security, raises living standards in rural communities, encourages the establishment of local industries, and reduces rural migration to cities.

The Arabic text depends largely on conjunctions to organise the sequence of ideas, whereas the English translation introduces punctuation and sentence division to improve readability and conform to English stylistic conventions. The communicative content remains unchanged, but the textual organisation is adapted to the discourse norms of the target language.

These differences illustrate a broader principle of literary translation: punctuation interacts closely with cohesion, sentence structure, and information flow. English generally favours shorter sentences separated by full stops and commas, whereas Arabic literary prose often tolerates longer coordinated structures. Consequently, translators frequently reorganise punctuation while preserving the logical and semantic relationships between ideas.

Punctuation also contributes significantly to narrative rhythm and emotional effect. Consider the following sentence:

"نظر إليها، وابتسم، ثم قال: "لن أعود."

A literal translation might read:

He looked at her, and smiled, then said, "I will never return."

Although grammatically acceptable, English literary style generally prefers:

He looked at her, smiled, and said, "I will never return."

Alternatively, where the context requires greater dramatic emphasis, the translator may choose:

He looked at her. Smiled. Then whispered, "I will never return."

Although the propositional meaning remains unchanged, punctuation alters pacing, emphasis, and emotional intensity. Such examples demonstrate that punctuation functions as a stylistic resource rather than simply as a grammatical convention.

Paragraph organisation presents similar challenges. Arabic literary texts frequently contain long paragraphs characterised by extensive coordination and descriptive development, whereas contemporary English publishing conventions generally favour shorter paragraphs corresponding to shifts in scene,

speaker, perspective, or narrative focus. Translators often restructure paragraph boundaries to improve readability while preserving the overall organisation and coherence of the original narrative.

Dialogue punctuation also differs between the two languages. English employs highly standardised editorial conventions involving quotation marks, reporting clauses, paragraph division, and punctuation placement. Arabic literary texts—particularly older publications—may follow different conventions or use punctuation less systematically. Consequently, translators must adapt dialogue punctuation to the editorial expectations of English readers without altering the conversational dynamics or literary style of the source text.

The importance of punctuation in translation has long been recognised. Newmark (1988) argues that punctuation constitutes an essential aspect of discourse analysis because it provides semantic indications of the relationships between clauses and sentences, relationships that often differ across languages. Likewise, Nida (1982) maintains that punctuation should reinforce the intended interpretation of a text rather than compensate for poorly organised language. In other words, punctuation should clarify existing meaning rather than restructure it.

The misuse of punctuation may significantly alter interpretation. Consider the following Arabic example:

سَاءت حالة الأسرة بعد موت عائلها؛ لأنه لم يدخر شيئاً.

A natural English translation is:

The family's situation deteriorated after the death of its breadwinner because he had left them no savings.

The Arabic semicolon correctly indicates a causal relationship between the two clauses. Replacing it with a comma weakens this logical connection and may create ambiguity concerning the relationship between cause and effect. Translators must therefore recognise not only the formal punctuation marks used in the source text but also the semantic relationships they express.

Similarly, punctuation distinguishes different communicative intentions:

إما أعظم الآثار المصرية

How magnificent the Egyptian monuments are!

compared with:

ما أعظم الآثار المصرية؟

How magnificent are the Egyptian monuments?

Although the lexical content is identical, the punctuation marks signal entirely different speech acts—exclamation in the first example and interrogation in the second. Omitting or misusing punctuation would obscure the intended communicative meaning.

From a functional perspective, punctuation contributes to syntactic organisation, semantic interpretation, discourse cohesion, stylistic expression, and reader response. Translators should therefore avoid preserving punctuation mechanically whenever such preservation conflicts with the conventions of the target language. Instead, punctuation should be adapted systematically to reproduce equivalent communicative and stylistic effects.

Overall, punctuation should be regarded as an integral component of functional equivalence rather than a peripheral orthographic feature. Like passive voice, word order, grammatical gender, and textual cohesion, punctuation influences how readers process narrative structure, interpret meaning, and experience literary style. Successful Arabic–English literary translation therefore requires translators to make informed punctuation choices that preserve the communicative function, aesthetic quality, and discourse organisation of the original text while conforming to the stylistic expectations of English literary writing. This function-oriented approach reinforces the central argument advanced throughout this study: translation equivalence is achieved through the preservation of communicative effect rather than the mechanical reproduction of linguistic form.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that grammatical constraints in Arabic–English literary translation are not limited to differences in linguistic structures but represent complex discourse resources that contribute to meaning, style, and reader interpretation. The analysis of passive voice, word order, grammatical gender, textual connectivity, and punctuation reveals that successful literary translation cannot depend solely on formal correspondence. Instead, translators must consider the communicative functions of grammatical structures within their textual, cultural, and stylistic contexts.

The study supports contemporary perspectives that view translation as an interpretative and communicative activity rather than a process of direct linguistic substitution. Although early linguistic approaches, particularly Catford's (1965) theory of translation shifts, recognised that structural differences between languages often require grammatical modification, the present findings show that such modifications should be understood as functional strategies for preserving meaning and literary effect. This conclusion reinforces Nida's (1964) distinction between formal and dynamic equivalence, demonstrating that literal grammatical similarity does not always produce an effective or natural translation.

The analysis of passive voice illustrates the importance of functional decision-making in translation. Although both Arabic and English employ passive constructions, their frequency and communicative purposes differ. The findings indicate that maintaining passive structures mechanically may result in translations that are grammatically correct but stylistically inappropriate. Translators should therefore determine whether passive voice contributes to narrative focus, thematic development, or perspective before deciding whether to retain, modify, or replace it with an active construction. This supports Baker's (2018) argument that grammatical equivalence should be evaluated according to communicative function rather than formal similarity.

Word order provides another example of the need for functional adaptation. Arabic allows greater flexibility in sentence organisation, often using changes in constituent order for rhetorical emphasis and stylistic purposes, whereas English generally relies on more fixed syntactic patterns. The findings suggest that translators should prioritise information structure, thematic progression, and readability rather than preserve Arabic word order literally. This approach corresponds with Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) systemic functional view of grammar as a resource for creating meaning rather than simply a set of formal rules. Reorganising sentence structure according to English conventions enables translators to maintain narrative emphasis while producing natural target texts.

The discussion of grammatical gender further demonstrates that grammatical categories cannot be transferred mechanically between languages. Arabic encodes gender extensively through nouns, verbs, adjectives, and pronouns, whereas English generally depends on natural gender and often leaves gender unspecified. The findings show that translators must distinguish between gender markers that are merely grammatical and those that contribute to characterisation, social relationships, or literary interpretation. Functional equivalence allows gender neutralisation when English conventions favour implicit reference while requiring preservation when gender carries important communicative meaning. This highlights the role of translator judgement in resolving grammatical differences.

The analysis of textual connectivity and punctuation confirms that discourse organisation is central to achieving literary equivalence. Arabic literary texts often rely on explicit coordination, repetition, and extended sentence structures, while English literary discourse generally prefers greater syntactic variety, lexical economy, and controlled use of conjunctions. The findings indicate that excessive preservation of

Arabic cohesive patterns may create unnatural English prose, whereas excessive adaptation may weaken the rhetorical and stylistic identity of the original. Translators must therefore balance fidelity to the source text with the expectations of the target language through careful grammatical and stylistic adjustments. The findings have several theoretical implications. First, they challenge the assumption that grammatical equivalence should be understood primarily as structural correspondence. Instead, equivalence should be viewed as a dynamic relationship between linguistic form, communicative function, and reader response. Different grammatical structures in the target language may successfully achieve equivalent effects when they perform similar communicative roles.

Second, the study demonstrates that grammatical features should not be analysed independently. Passive constructions, word order, gender agreement, cohesion, and punctuation interact to create overall textual meaning and literary effect. Changing one grammatical feature may influence other aspects of the text, requiring translators to approach literary translation as an integrated communicative process rather than a sentence-level activity.

Third, the findings emphasise the importance of translator agency. Translation decisions are shaped not only by linguistic systems but also by the translator's professional judgement regarding meaning, style, cultural expectations, and reader accessibility. Therefore, grammatical shifts should not be considered deviations from the source text but evidence of translation competence and informed decision-making. The study also has important implications for translator education. Translation training often focuses heavily on lexical equivalence while giving less attention to discourse-level grammar and stylistic organisation. The findings suggest that training programmes should emphasise functional grammar, information structure, cohesion, and stylistic variation. Students should learn to analyse grammatical choices according to their communicative purposes within complete texts rather than treating grammatical forms as isolated structures.

For professional translators, the study proposes several practical principles. Grammatical correspondence should be considered a possible strategy rather than the ultimate aim of translation. Translators should evaluate grammatical structures according to their contribution to meaning, coherence, and literary style, and grammatical adaptations should be introduced systematically to preserve the function of the original text. At the same time, translators should respect the stylistic identity of the source text while ensuring that the target text conforms to the expectations of English readers.

Despite its contributions, the study has certain limitations. It focuses specifically on grammatical constraints in Arabic–English literary translation and does not examine broader issues such as lexical, cultural, ideological, or technological aspects of translation except where they interact with grammar. Additionally, the examples analysed are illustrative rather than exhaustive. Future research could expand this framework by examining larger translation corpora, different literary genres, and the influence of computer-assisted translation and artificial intelligence on grammatical decision-making.

Overall, the study confirms that grammatical differences between Arabic and English should not be viewed as barriers to translation but as opportunities for informed linguistic and cultural choices. Literary translation achieves success not through mechanical reproduction of grammatical forms but through preserving the communicative functions those forms perform. Functional equivalence therefore provides a more comprehensive framework for addressing grammatical constraints and producing translations that are accurate, natural, and stylistically effective.

6. Conclusion

This study has examined the principal grammatical constraints encountered in translating Arabic literary texts into English, focusing on passive voice, word order, grammatical gender, textual connectivity, and punctuation. Rather than treating these phenomena as isolated linguistic difficulties, the analysis has demonstrated that they function collectively as discourse resources that shape meaning, narrative organisation, stylistic expression, and reader interpretation. Consequently, the findings suggest that successful literary translation depends not on preserving grammatical form but on reproducing the communicative functions that grammatical structures perform within the source text.

The comparative analysis shows that many grammatical differences between Arabic and English arise from the distinct ways in which the two languages organise information and construct discourse. Arabic generally favours greater syntactic flexibility, explicit cohesion, extensive gender agreement, and longer coordinated structures, whereas English typically relies on a more fixed word order, natural gender, lexical

variation, and concise sentence organisation. Because these differences are systemic rather than superficial, literal grammatical correspondence frequently produces translations that are structurally accurate but stylistically unnatural and communicatively less effective. Functional restructuring therefore becomes an essential component of high-quality literary translation.

The study also reinforces the relevance of functional approaches to translation. Drawing on the work of Nida, Catford, Baker, and Halliday and Matthiessen, it has argued that grammatical equivalence should be understood in terms of communicative purpose rather than formal similarity. Translation shifts—including changes from passive to active constructions, reorganisation of word order, neutralisation or explicit marking of gender, modification of cohesive devices, and adaptation of punctuation—should not be viewed as departures from the source text but as informed strategies for preserving meaning, literary style, and reader response across languages.

An important contribution of this study is its emphasis on the interdependence of grammatical choices. Passive constructions influence thematic focus, word order determines information structure, gender contributes to reference and characterisation, cohesive devices create textual coherence, and punctuation shapes rhythm and narrative pacing. These features operate together to produce the overall literary effect of a text. Translators must therefore evaluate grammatical phenomena within the wider context of discourse rather than at the level of individual sentences or isolated linguistic forms.

The findings have practical implications for both professional translation and translator education. Literary translators should approach grammar as a communicative resource rather than as a system of forms requiring direct correspondence. Translation training should likewise place greater emphasis on discourse analysis, systemic functional linguistics, information structure, cohesion, and stylistic variation in order to prepare translators to make informed grammatical decisions across languages.

Although this study has focused specifically on grammatical constraints in Arabic–English literary translation, its analytical framework may also prove valuable for other language pairs in which substantial structural differences influence translation practice. Future research could build upon the present study through corpus-based investigations of published literary translations, comparative analyses across different literary genres, empirical studies of translators' decision-making processes, and evaluations of how computer-assisted translation and artificial intelligence systems manage grammatical restructuring in literary texts.

In conclusion, grammatical constraints should not be regarded simply as obstacles to translation but as opportunities for informed linguistic and interpretative decision-making. Literary translation succeeds not through mechanical reproduction of grammatical structures but through the preservation of their communicative, stylistic, and discourse functions. By integrating grammatical analysis with contemporary functional theories of translation, this study provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how translators can negotiate the structural differences between Arabic and English while maintaining the literary integrity, readability, and aesthetic effect of the source text. It is hoped that this framework will contribute to ongoing research in Arabic–English translation studies and provide practical guidance for translators, educators, and researchers engaged in literary translation.

7. References

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