Challenges of Translating English Pragmatic Markers into Kurdish by EFL Students

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the translation of Pragmatic Markers (PMs) by Kurdish EFL students. This study demonstrates an innovative method/practice of utilizing translation to study the linguistic phenomena, Pragmatic Markers (PMs) (cf. Fischer 2006; Fraser, 1999; Aijmer, 2002). Based on the Relevance Theoretic Framework and polysemy approach, this paper consolidates research that examines the challenges that face EFL students of English Department at Salahaddin University, Erbil. The data were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. The results revealed that Kurdish EFL students use a variety of PMs in their writing, with some PMs being overused and others being underused. The study suggests that teachers should help Kurdish EFL students to use PMs effectively in their writing. Also, the results showed that the majority of participants had difficulty in

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recognizing the more complex adversative and causal PMs, while they had very few issues with Additive PMs. In conclusion, Kurdish EFL students may recognize Additive PMs and translate them with less difficulty than identifying more complex adversative and causal PMs.

Key Word : pragmatic markers. Discourse .relevance theory .translation .EFL learning

الطرائق اللغوية في رواية طريق فلاندرا لكلود سيمون

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الـمستخلـص

تهدف الدراســـة إلى التحقق من اســـتخدام المتعلمون الاكراد للغة الانكليزية كلغة اجنبية العلامات التخاطبية عند الترجمة(PMs) . و توضـح الدراسـة ايضـا طريقة مبتكرة لاستخدام الترجمة لدراسـة الظواهر اللغوية واســـتنادًا إلى الإطار النظري الملائم ونهج تعدد المعاني يهدف البحث الحالي الى دراســـة التحديات التي تواجه طلاب اللغة الإنكليزية كلغة أجنبية في قسـم اللغة الإنكليزية في جامعة صــلاح الدين ١ أربيل. وقد تم تحليل البيانات كميا ونوعيا وقد كشـفت النتائج التي تم التوصـل اليها أن المتعلمون الاكراد للغة الإنكليزية كلغة أجنبية يستخدمون مجموعة متنوعة من العلامات التخاطبية في كتاباتهم ، مع الإفراط في اسـتخدام بعض منها بينما يتم اسـتخدام البعض الآخر بشـكل غير كافٍ. تقترح الدراسة أنه يجب على المعلمين مساعدة الطلاب الأكراد في اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية على استخدام علامات التخاطب بفعالية في كتاباتهم. وأيضًا أظهرت النتائج أن غالبية المشـاركين واجهوا صـــعوبة في التعرف على علامات التخاطب التي تفيد السـببية والنقيض الأكثر تعقيدًا، بينما كان لديهم عدد قليل جدًا من المشكلات مع التي تفيد الإضافة.

في الختام، يمكن لطلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية أن يتعرفوا على علامات التخاطب الاضـــافية ويمكن ترجمتها بصعوبة أقل من التي أكثر تعقيدًا وسببيًا.

الكلمات الدالة: علامات التخاطب، التخاطب.

Introduction:
Pragmatic markers (PMs) are an important aspect of any language use. They are words or phrases that help to connect sentences and ideas, making a text more coherent and easier

to understand. PMs can be used to signal relationships between ideas, indicate the speaker's attitude or opinion, and highlight important information. Previous research has shown that the use of PMs varies across different languages and cultures, and that non-native speakers may struggle to use them effectively in their writing.

In between the two possible ways of dealing with the multi-functionality of PMs (monosemy and homonymy), the polysemy approach assumes that there are different distinct readings of a PM and that these different senses are related (Fischer 2006; Fraser, 1999; Aijmer, 2002). We will adopt this latter position in this paper with respect to the analysis of pragmatic markers (PMs) in English and their Kurdish equivalences. The current study explores the challenges that EFL students face when translating PMs within a selected persuasive text. The targeted PMs are intendedly used in the sample text (Source Language, SL) in order to find out how EFL students treat them when translating the text to Kurdish (Target Language, TL). This approach would also tap into areas where EFL students in the College of Education, English Department need to develop. This is particularly important due to the fact that there are various definitions of Pragmatic Markers and there is no consensus among researchers on a single inclusive definition of PMs.

In this study, a collection of definitions of PMs are presented then the most relevant one is adopted so as to specify the functions of PMs in question. It is worth mentioning that there are also several approaches towards identifying PMs based on the mode of communication (spoken or written) and the genre in which the speech is presented (Lakoff ,1977; Fraser, 1995; Blakemore, 1987, 2002; Iten, 2000; Hall, 2007). The PMs are classified according to Halliday and Hasan's (1976) classification of conjunctive relations, namely: Additive, Adversative, Causal, and Temporal. The reason for this depending on this classification is that it has proven to be the most comprehensive taxonomy of PMs in English language. This way, it will be easier to identify and group the PMs occurring in the SL text and it would help creating a paradigm of correspondences in Kurdish language.

1. Theoretical background

The English PM has been dealt with widely by several researchers such as Lakoff (1977), Fraser (1995), Blakemore (1987, 2002), Iten (2000) and Hall (2007). It has been described with various labels such as 'discourse marker', 'connective', 'pragmatic marker', 'pragmatic cues' and 'cohesive device'. However, in light of the *Relevance Theory* (RT) and according to Wilson and Sperber (1995), relevance theory is "an inferential theory of communication, which aims at explaining how the audience infers the communicator's intended meaning" (1995: 176). In this sense, human cognition is thought to be directed towards the maximization of relevance between two inputs, in a way that the information an input carries has a relation with information already stored in the cognitive system to strengthen an existing assumption or to contradict and eliminate an assumption, and 'the higher cognitive effects the input has, the more relevant it is' (Ibid: 177). Thus, relevance can be thought of as a positive function of effects achieved, and a negative function of effort incurred. That is, the relevance needs to be achieved with minimum efforts. This is in line with Wilson and Sperber's claim that "use of an obvious stimulus may create precise and predictable expectations of relevance not raised by other stimuli" (Wilson and Sperber, 2004: 617). For instance, successful communication is a matter of the reader recognizing the writer's communicative intentions, typically by utilizing suitable connectives in order to help the reader get to the point faster.

The meanings associated with the PMs are context-dependent, thus PMs should not be examined in isolation. For instance, it is very difficult to answer a question like: What does a particular PM mean? Whereas it is easier to answer a question such as: How is a PM used in a given context? Schiffrin claims that "discourse markers (DMs)" - here named pragmatic markers- could have 'semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic roles simultaneously but they are not 'structural or semantic components in the sentence" (1987: 190). Nonetheless, this multi-functionality is different based on the categories of the PM group. For example, conjunctions have pragmatic effects that are closely associated with the type of meaning they signal, such as the case of "*but*" which reflects a difference between two text segments S1 and S2. The semantic meaning implied by the connection could be *contrary to expectation*, *contrast*, *correction* or *cancellation*. Thus, one can conclude that all PMs share a pragmatic function (e.g: when used in a discourse to join a previous utterance to a current one) and not solely a semantic meaning.

Blakemore (1987) analyses PM as a linguistic expression that does not contribute to the content of the sentence. Adopting the RT framework, Blakemore argues that PMs in general mean "and + something else". We attempt to explain the "something else" through translating PMs into Kurdish. In a similar line, Zwicky (1984) claims that these markers are independent units of the sentence which usually operate at a pragmatic level and beyond the scope of function words. The position of PMs is usually at the beginning of the sentence, and they serve as a joint in the conversation. Zwicky states that PMs "are prosodically separate and independent from their surrounding text" (1984: 285). Research has shown that the use of PMs varies across different languages and cultures. For example, Turkish speakers tend to use more connectives than English speakers, while Spanish speakers use more discourse markers (Simpson-Vlach & Ellis, 2010). Non-native speakers of English may also struggle to use PMs effectively in their writing, as they may not be familiar with the specific functions of different PMs or may use them inappropriately (Chen & Baker, 2010).

2. Translation and linguistics

As far as translation and linguistics are concerned, the assumption is that translation data contain texts that are intended to express the same meanings and have identical or at least very similar textual functions in the two languages concerned, here English and Kurdish. Dyvik was one of the first to argue in favour of the use of translation data to establish the precise semantic values of words. He suggests that "by successively using the source and target language as a starting-point, we can establish paradigms of correspondences: the translations can be arranged as a paradigm where each target item corresponds to a different meaning of the source item" (1998: 12). Simon-Vandenbergen likewise states that "translations of pragmatic markers can serve as a heuristic for discovering contextual dimensions or for making more fine-grained divisions in these dimensions, because the translations force one to account for the contextual factors that lead to particular choices" (2006: 111). These choices may pose challenges for translators when translating PMs into Kurdish in a persuasive text. As of now, there is little linguistic research regarding Kurdish PMs and hence there is no recognized list of Kurdish PMs from which to select equivalents to English PMs. Given that translation is a skill which should be taught in a monolingual EFL classroom, translation activities provide common ground where the use of mother tongue is legitimate, meaningful and serves a useful purpose.

2.1 Pragmatic markers in translation studies

Experimental research undertaken in settings beyond English-speaking contexts requires the additional work of data translation, which is essential to contribute to the international literature and to correct Anglo-centrism in academic fields. Such research will also contribute to broader engagement with research-based knowledge from non-Anglo-phone settings to develop, enrich, and challenge social theory. More significantly, better recognition of research conducted in non-Anglo-phone settings will encourage the emergence of theories of knowledge from many different contexts. Despite a huge amount of research in non-English speaking contexts over the past 100 years, literature addressing issues related to data translation still needs to be explored.

In light of this field of research, pragmatic markers have also been of interest to translators. Because of their multifunctionality¬ and context-boundness they are difficult to translate. Often, they are not translated literally but are rendered by words or constructions from many different word classes. Moreover, they are often omitted from the translation (Aijmer & Simon-Vandenbergen 2003; Altenberg & Aijmer 2002). Matamala (2007) has studied the strategies used to translate oh in English sitcoms in the versions dubbed into Catalan. Compare also Chaume (2004) on discourse markers in audiovisual translating. Bazzanella and Morra (2000) stress the specific problems of translating discourse markers, illustrating this with the translations of well into Italian. In the study by Cuenca (2008) the focus is on what we can discover about the multifunctionality of well on the basis of a contrastive analysis of the film Four weddings and a funeral and its translations in Spanish and Catalan.

2.2 Pragmatic markers in native versus non-native speaker communication

The study of pragmatic markers has entered a number of new fields such as second language acquisition ('interlanguage pragmatics').We can now take advantage of learner corpora to make comparisons between native and non-native speakers of English. One of the first studies was by Nikula (1996), who compared the use of pragmatic markers with a hedging function in conversations by native (English) speakers with non-native Finnish speakers. It is especially the existence of spoken learner corpora such as the LINDSEI Corpus (Louvain International Database of Spoken English Interlanguage) which invites scholars to make comparisons (de Cock 2004).

Simone Müller (2005; cf. also Müller 2004) has examined a corpus of German learners' use of so, well, you know and like in comparison with native speakers' use. Buysse (2007) examines how Belgian native speakers of Dutch use so in different types of ¬question-answer sequences in an English interview setting. The results of such studies show that learners use pragmatic markers differently from native speakers. A similar study by Romero-Trillo (2002) described the situation in non-native language as the pragmatic fossilization of discourse markers. Llinares-García and RomeroTrillo (2006) is a study of discourse markers in the EFL classroom. Another study by the same authors showed that native and non-native teachers used discourse markers differently in CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) contexts and much more frequently than Spanish teachers in a native context (Llinares-García & RomeroTrillo 2008).

Hasselgren (2002) studied what she referred to as 'small words' as markers of learner fluency focusing on young Norwegian learners of English. Gilquin (2008) has shown that the frequency and distribution of hesitation markers (including like, I mean, you know) were different across native/non-native speaker contexts (see also Fuller 2003).

3. Methodology
3.1 Data Collection

The data comprise of translation of all occurrences of PMs in the translation of a sample text from English to Kurdish by 40 EFL students at the English Department of College of Education in Salahaddin University. The students are of senior stage (4th year) and they are comprised of male and female students. This study does not take into account the gender parity regarding the research of PMs as it is not particularly relevant in the current study. The total number of words of all the 40 translation of the sample text is 11080 words. The total number of words in the English sample text was 227 words. The total number of PMs in the original English sample text is 14 PMs. The percentage of PM use in the English text was 6.17% of the total number of words. This percentage is rather on the lower side is compared to other corpus studies. Nonetheless, this is not a corpus study, and the focus is not on frequencies, but rather on the quality of translation of the PMs by EFL students. This approach was used in order to control the number of variables for the analysis of the translated texts. While, if we had instructed the students to write an essay on a certain topic, then it would have been difficult to identify the challenges the students have in translating certain PMs.

3.2 Data Analysis

The main method of analysis in the current study is a qualitative one. However, it is worth mentioning that the quantitative side of the data cannot be ignored. In order to map out the targeted pragmatic markers in question, we prepared a specific persuasive text to be translated by 40 senior students at the English Department of College of Education. Thus, data for this study consists of 40 translations of a single text from English to Kurdish. Total number of words (n-value) was 11080 words. All the occurrences of pragmatic markers were identified by the researchers, without notifying the participants, then the translations of all these occurrences were documented to set up the paradigm of correspondences between English and Kurdish PMs. The PMs occurred in the sample text are listed in table 1, along with their frequencies. Some of the PMs have more than one occurrence. This is particularly important as to see how EFL students translate each occurrence depending on their contexts.

	English Pragmatic Markers	Frequency in Sample Text	Percentage
1.	As	1	0.44%
2.	And	2	0.88%
3.	Also	3	1.32%
4.	In fact	1	0.44%
5.	Because	1	0.44%
6.	Thus	2	0.88%
7.	But	1	0.44%
8.	However	1	0.44%
9.	Additionally	1	0.44%
10.	While	1	0.44%
11.	Despite	1	0.44%

Table 1: Occurrence and frequencies of English PMs

The above list and surrounding texts were identified in the translations of the sample text. The Kurdish PMs suggested by EFL students were listed (see table 2) in order to build up a taxonomy and a paradigm of correspondences. The most common Kurdish equivalences were chosen to represent Kurdish PMs corresponding to the English PMs.

Kurdish Pragmatic Markers	In Latin Alphabet	English PMs	Frequency in the 40 translated texts	Average Percentage
لەگەڵ	Lagal	As	40	0.36%
و	W	And	67	0.60%
هەروەها	Herweha	Also	46	0.41%
لە راستیدا	La rastida	In fact	42	0.37%
چونکە	Chwnka	Because	43	0.38%
کەواتە	Kewate	Thus	45	0.40%
بەڵام	Belam	but	48	0.43%
لەگەڵ ئەوەشدا	Legel awashda	However	32	0.28%
جگەلەوەش	Jigalewesh	Additionally	40	0.36%
لە کاتێکدا	La katekda	While	41	0.37%
ئەگەرچی	Agarchi	Despite	40	0.36%

Table 2: Occurrence and frequencies of Kurdish PMs (40 translations of a single English text)

These examples result in a corpus that can be used to identify the possible meanings of PMs in Kurdish. However, using translation corpora as base for analysis seems to be biased, because of the diversity of results and according to Degande "not only is there a problem of context and typological differences, one should also be careful not to generalize individual instances of language use" (2009: 178). Nonetheless, in terms of the correspondence paradigms, it is possible to obtain suggestive results in assigning certain meanings to words, especially connectives. Aijimer et al argue that "such semantic fields can be established by checking back and forth" (2006: 111). Thus, the correspondence paradigm is built by double checking the equivalences, i.e, through translation and back translation we can assign correspondence values to the functional equivalences. For instance, if *but* in English is translated by *belam* and *legel aweshda* in Kurdish, then using Kurdish as a source language, we should be able to check for the translation of *belam* and *legel aweshda* in English, which will become the target language. Such an analysis, Aijmer et al state would allow us 'to show how the pragmatic marker X is related to other pragmatic markers, or to other linguistic items such as modal particles or response words, in the same language' (Ibid.: 112).

Also, Dyvik states, in favor of this approach, that "translators have no theoretic concern in mind, evaluate the interpretational possibilities of linguistic expressions […], and then try to recreate the same interpretational possibilities in a target text serving a comparable purpose in another language" (1998: 7). Finally, a translation approach to examining

linguistic phenomena seems to meet the criteria for most of the demands of contemporary linguistics, as Noël states that 'it is corpus-based, it is contrastive and thus has typological relevance [...], it is task-based, in as much as it treats translation data as a collection of informants' judgments about the meanings of the linguistic forms in the source text' (2003: 759).

4 Results and Analysis

After identifying the translations produced by 40 participants, and tabulating them as shown in the previous section, if interesting to see that some PMs have been increased in the TL and some other PMs have had more than one choice in the translations. For example, the English PM "*and*" is translated by some of the translators as "*w*" and as "*herweha*" by some others (See example 1). In between these two choices, there is a third occurrence as "*w herweha*" which are translated as *"and also"*. This is particularly challenging when dealing with translated data as to which equivalence should we assign a particular PM. This is also a reason why the frequency of PMs in the translated data has increased.

(1) As online learning becomes more common **and** more resources are converted to digital form…

لەگەڵ زیاتربوونی فێربوونی ئۆنلاین و گۆڕینی سەرچاوەی زیاتر بۆ فۆرمی دیجیتاڵی…

The Kurdish PM "w" is mentioned by Salih (2014) to be overused by Kurdish writers and it is used to add two words, two expressions, and/or two sentences (see example 2). It has the highest frequencies in other genres as well for example in "online opinion articles" (Salih, 2014: 67). Thus, it is rather natural to see an increase of the frequency of Kurdish "w" (and).

(2) Additionally, staring too long at a screen has been shown to cause health problems, including blurred vision, dizziness, dry eyes, **and** headaches.

جگە لەوەش دەرکەوتووە کە زۆر سەیرکردنی شاشە دەبێتە هۆی کێشەی تەندروستی، لەوانە کاڵبوونەوەی بینین و سەرگێژخواردن و وشکبوونەوەی چاو و سەرئێشە.

As far as adversative PMs are concerned, there are discrepancies in the equivalences for "but" and "however". The discrepancies are realized in the different frequencies of these two English PMs in the translated data. Also, the majority of the students seem to have little information on the procedural meaning of these two PMs. According to the Relevance Theory, there are procedural functions of PMs such as (S1 PM S2), i.e, "there is a conjunctive relation (whether additive, adversative, causal, or temporal) between two segments of text" (Yu, 2008:130). Based on this approach, the procedural meaning signaled by "*but*" should be different from the one signaled by "*however*". According to Schiffrin, the adversative relations "preface an upcoming proposition whose content contrasts with that of the prior proposition" (1988: 187). In Halliday and Hasan's (1976) classification the most common adversative connectives are listed and classified into four subclasses: *adversative*, *contrastive*, *correction* and *dismissal*, and are distinguished according to their functions in connecting sentences and paragraphs.

The translation data indicates that Kurdish language is not yet a PM-rich language. In fact, some of the participants had no choice but omitting some PMs and not translating them from English into Kurdish. The reason for omitting certain PMs could be because of the lack of appropriate equivalents or the lack of knowledge on the part of Kurdish EFL

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students. This fact proves that the most common error in translating PMs is omission. Literal translation is another common error, made by the participants. For instance, the English word "physical" is translated into Kurdish as "فیزیکی" .

5- Conclusions:

The results of this study suggest that Kurdish EFL students use a variety of pragmatic markers (PMs) in their writing but may not use them effectively or may use them inappropriately. Teachers should help students to understand the specific functions

Kurdish EFL students overuse form PMs and underuse some others. The most frequently used PMs were "w" (and), "herweha" (also/and), "jige lewesh" (in addition) which were used by almost all of the students. However, some PMs were underused, such as "leger aweshda" (despite), leber awe" (therefore). Qualitative analysis revealed that PMs were used to link ideas within sentences, as well as between sentences and paragraphs. PMs were also used to express the writers' attitude or opinion, to emphasize important information, and to introduce new ideas. However, some students used PMs inappropriately or excessively, which resulted in a lack of clarity and coherence in their translated text.

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