Problems Encountered in Translating Alternative Questions From Arabic into English

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Abstract: This paper is an attempt to tackle problems and difficulties faced by the university students of English when translating alternative questions from Arabic into English in their written performance. A questionnaire of 10 sentences taken from Modern standard Arabic is designed and distributed to a sample of 40 students. The participants have been asked to translate Arabic alternative questions into English. It is hypothesized that the learners of English are not fully aware when translating alternative questions from Arabic to English. The study aims at examining the students’ awareness of alternative questions and trying to focus on the problems that students face when they want to express the alternative questions in both English and Arabic in order to be understood and helpful for learners, translators and other.
pedagogical issues. The findings imply that many contributors used synonymy and literal translation and different tenses to translate alternative questions or they paraphrase the sentences according to their knowledge and perform the English equivalent. This is because of the lack of knowledge of alternative questions. Some recommendations that can help translators, learners and students to develop their competence of alternative questions are also given in this study.
1. Introduction

According to Quirk et al (1985) Questions are divided into three major classes according to the type of answer they expect (a) the answers that expect affirmation or refusing are called “Yes- No questions”, as in: Do you pass the exam? (b) Those that reply with information are called “ WH- questions as in: What is your name? (c) The answers that expect as the reply one of two or more options presented in the question are called “ alternative questions” as in: Would you like to travel by car or plane? (Ibid:193).

This study is going to tackle with the third class of questions “ alternatives”. The alternative question (AQs for short) is one of the tree classes of question which there is an option to reply to the question. It attempts to encounter problems and difficulties used by the English University students when translating alternative questions from Arabic into English in their written performance. The purpose behind this study is to help students of English understand very well this syntactic phenomenon when they translate Arabic alternative questions into English and vice versa. The findings imply that many contributors used synonymy and literal translation to translate alternative questions or they paraphrase the sentences according to their knowledge and perform the English equivalent. This is because of the lack of knowledge of alternative questions. The study concludes with some recommendations that can help translators, learners and students to develop their competence of alternative questions.

1.2 The Aims of the Paper

The current paper aims at:
1. examining the students' awareness of alternative questions.
2. Trying to focus on the problems that students face when they want to express the alternative questions in both English and Arabic.
3. Pointing out the difficulties that students compel concerning alternative questions
4. Offering advises to remedial errors when using alternative questions in English and Arabic.

1.3. Hypothesis

It is hypothesized that the foreign students of English are not attentive of understating alternative questions; therefore, they translate them arbitrarily.

1.4. Problem of the study

Students may be hindered by obstruction of their local language so; they neglect to ace the acknowledgment and creation of alternative questions.

1.5. Model of the Study

The current study adopts Nidhal Jalil Hamzah (2011) model, A study that deals with contrastive analysis of English and Arabic.
1.6. Data Collection and Procedures

A theoretical part of this paper is taken from books of grammar of Arabic and English. The second part of the paper tackles the students’ performance of the one of the syntactic phenomenon “alternative question”. The students are in the third class for the academic year 2018-2019 in the department of English, college of Education, University of Al Hamdaniya. Then, the given data are analyzed according to previous study that was done by Nidhal Jalil Hamzah (2011).

1.7. Value of the Study

The current study is of benefit for linguists, teachers, students and translators. It is also expected to be worthy to pedagogical planners and planning, and for other academic purposes and those who work in translation.

2. Alternative Questions in Arabic

In Arabic, the structure of the alternative question is composed of the question marker ‘hamza’ at the beginning of the sentence and the coordinator marker ‘am’ in the middle of a sentence (Hamza:2011). Consider the following example:

أعتدك سمير أم جلال؟
Is Samir or Jalal with you?

Similarly, Wright (1996: 307 cited in Hamza, 2011) points out that if another part is linked by the coordinator ‘am’ with the one beginning with the question marker ‘hamza’, there arises a disjunction or alternative question. This class of a question based on the use of the question marker ‘hamza’ of awareness and the linked and coordinator marker ‘am’:

أ طالب في الصف أم معلم؟
Is there student or a teacher in the class?

Hamza (2011) divides the alternative questions in Arabic according to their usage into:(a) They can be used to ask about a subject as in (3), a predicate as in (4), an object as in (5), adverb of manner as in (6), adverb of time as in (7) and a prepositional phrase as in (8):

أ انت فعلت هذا أم يوسف؟
Have you done this or Yousif?

أ ترفض العرض أم تقبلها.
Do you reject the offer or take it?

أ رعدا تقعد أم جلال؟
Do you mean Raad or Jalal?

أ راكبا حضرت أم ماشي؟
Did you present by car or on feet?

أ شهر الثالث قدمت أم شهر الرابع؟
Have you come on March or April?

هل نسيت المفتاح في البيت أم في السوق؟
Did you forget the key in the house or at the market?

It is obvious from the above examples that the Arabic alternative question is made of two equal structures. The first structure begins with the question marker ‘hamza’ that occurs before the item/s to be requested about, while the second structure begins with coordinator marker ‘am’ which also occurs before inquired item/s. We can sum up that in all cases there is an option in choosing the desired item.

2.1 Types of Alternative Questions

Arabic alternative questions are divided into two classes; Yes/ No alternative questions and wh- alternative questions. Hamza, (2011:34)

2.1.1 Yes/ No Alternative Questions

Parallel to a yes/no question, the structure of alternative question begins with the question marker ‘hamza’ but the difference lies in the second parts. A yes-no question is a one part structure, whereas as a sentence with alternative question has two equal parts. In both structures, the question marker ‘hamza’ is introduced initially but there is an additional item added to alternative question that distinct from a yes-no question which is called the coordinator ‘am’. In the former a reply to the question will be either yes or no depends to the addressee while in latter a reply will be like a choice to pick up an item that the addressee will choose. consequently:

أ قابلت المدير؟
Did you meet the boss?

However, in yes/no alternative question, the questioner does not seek after proof concerning the substance of the sentence. By utilizing the inquisitive ‘hamza’ of observation with associated ‘am’, he/she attempts to perceive the individual instead of its division by deciding one of the pieces of the sentence or predication. Likewise, the questioner is looking for the response to whether one of the decisions holds.

Then again, in yes/no alternative question, people/things/activities, as option, got some information about come after both the inquisitive ‘hamza’ of recognition and after the associated ‘am’.

As indicated by Hamza, (2011) an inquisitive ‘hamza’ can be erased in AQs if there is something with regards to circumstance alluding to it. This alludes to the nearness of the associated ‘am’ which comes after ‘hamza’. The verifiable ‘hamza’ is comprehended from the semantic setting in which the associated and facilitated ‘am’ unfolds after ‘hamza’ of observation. Kinds of alternative questions yes/no elective inquiries and wh-elective inquiries comprises of two conditions pursued by the disjunctive molecule or\or not. This sort of inquiry is recognized structure
yes/no inquiries in that it offers various choices and the kind of sound. Yes/no elective inquiries take an ascent tone on every option (Quirk et al., 1985: 823).

2.1.2 Wh- Alternative Questions
Wh-question words are similarly to a yes/no question in structure in English only, therefore, the researcher will not tackle them because the main focus will be in Arabic.

2.3 Functions of Alternative Questions
The question marker 'hamza' is specialized in an alternative question in the following:

Have you drunk Milk or juice?

The Coordinator (or) is in the composition of the sentence, when the question is a perception. Do you admire in Literary books or scientific books?

Arab linguists concur that the job of the relevant factor is imperative to interfere with all expressions. There are sure contexts in which one can perceive how an alternative question is utilized to express further capacities from a simple cross examination. An alternative question can be utilized to demonstrate the importance of drawing the consideration of the recipient towards a specific thought or activity as in:

أ كتاب تحب أم مهلة؟

Do you like book or newspaper?

In this unique circumstance, the questioner realizes that the listener like books than newspaper, and his/her answer will be book. In any case, the questioner means to pull in the listener’s consideration. Moreover, alternative question can be appeared through insistence. At the point when the importance of the inquisitive ‘hamza’ is of assertion, so what comes after this or did they stray From the Path themselves?” (Ali, 2001: 892-93) states that an alternative question can be utilized to express the significance of leveling once it is gone before by specific articulations including. In this way, its significance isn't inquisitive rather evening out. Here, the inquisitive ‘hamza’ with the associated ‘am’ of adjustment guarantees that the two issues are equivalent to far as the speaker's understanding is concerned. An alternative question can be utilized which is disavowal. It alludes to a circumstance which demonstrates that something is inverse to what is should be. Refusal recommends that what comes after the inquisitive ‘hamza’ isn't right. On account of the alternative question, an inquiry is the structure A or B soliciting which from the recommendations is valid. For the elective perusing, the inquiry can't be replied by ‘yes’or ‘no’ and must be replied by a sentence giving data about reality and misrepresentation of the individual disjuncts, for example, Raad is in Sweden, or Suha isn't in Sweden (Chellian, 1997: 143). Bolinger (1978: 90) points out that when posing an alternative question, the speaker is just looking for the response to whether A or B holds. The speaker needs to give the feeling that he has no predisposition as for either elective as being increasingly valuable for the discussion objective. An alternative question can be demonstrated with the inquisitive marker on the two options, which may both be constructive or negative.
3. Data Analysis

A question in general is common to all languages and little studies were tackled it with a translation. An alternative question, on the other hand, is a more specific branch of the question, and is infrequently dedicated by grammarians within translation studies. Thus, the researchers intend to present something about this subject in the field of translation. So, 10 sentences were collected randomly from different resources and were given to students from different levels were chosen from 3rd stage in Al-Hamdaniya University, Department of English. The study is based on Quirk et al’s’ university book of grammar to be a model of this study. It seems that AQ is an easy subject for the first prima because it depends upon question particle alhamza and am, but in fact the difficulty lies in the structure and tense and this is what will be seen in the following analysis.

Discussion:

**Sentence 1:**
أ زيد في الدار أم عمرو؟
A Zaidun fi il dari am amro?

Most of the student, nearly 10 students translate the sentence into Is Zaid at home or Amro? In fact, they translate it correctly because if al Hamza is followed by a noun am must be followed by a noun too. Whereas other students change yes-no question into wh question by translating it into Who is at home, Zaid or Amro? This is also an acceptable one since it gives the same meaning. Another student uses the expletive that by saying Is that Zaid at home or Amro? And that is not needed in such a structure. Many other students were confused in using the correct tense by using (Did, Does, and Are) because of lacking the knowledge about forming the questions and tenses?

**Sentence 2:**
لا أدرأ أكل أم أشرب
ла адри а кл ам ашрб

The structure of this sentence may be more complicated than the previous one since 8 of 15 of the students translate the sentence into whether /if / either-----or-----? as in I don’t know whether to eat or drink? As a researcher in this subject, this is the most correct translation for the Arabic sentence. Whereas other students, unfortunately, provide us with unacceptable renderings at all nearly 7 students as in I don’t know eat or drink. Moreover, two of the students use model verb I don’t know may/should I eat or drink? That is because they lack the rules of using questions and model auxiliaries.

**Sentence 3:**
أ أنت مشارك بالأمسية الشعرية أم صديقك؟
а адят маршак ал амсия аль шурэйра ам садик?k

Two of the students here change the sentence from yes–no question into wh question as in Who participates in the poetry night you or your friend? Indeed, this
doesn’t affect on the meaning since the students give the same meaning by using another structure. As for tense, all of the students hesitated in giving the exact tense because some of them translate the sentence into past by using did. Although there are some mistakes in their renderings, most of the students somewhat are able to give the meaning of the source text. Finally, the following translation is the correct one: *Are you involved in the poetry evening or your friend?*

**Sentence 4:**

أ راغب انت في الأمر أم راغب عنه؟

This sentence is followed by two adverbs of manner after *alhamza* and after *am*. 8 of the students translate this sentence into *Do you agree with this matter or refuse it?* Also one of the students repeat the whole question after or into: *Do you want it or do you obligated to do it?* In fact, there is no problem in meaning but there is no need to repeat the whole question after *or* since English tends to brevity. Secondly, the two elements of alternative questions must be followed by two equal parts of speech and equal in tense. Other translations are: *Are you willing in this matter or do not willing to do it?* Here in this sentence the student made a big mistake by using two different auxiliaries before and after *or* *Are& do* respectively. Finally, 6 of the renderings are not acceptable at all. and the correct one is: *Do you want it or not?*

**Sentence 5:**

الحسن أم الحسين تفضّل أم ابن الحناية؟

Al Hassan am al Hssain tufadhil am Ibna Al Hanafiya?

This is one of the most confused structures in alternative question since the speaker uses the particle *am* twice. Thus instead of saying *الحسن والحسين تفضّل أم ابن الحناية* *Al Hssan wa AlHussain tufadhil am Ibna Al Hanafiya?* He utters the above sentence; it may be because of the requirements of the context. In fact, this leads to errors in renderings because 9 of the students render this sentence by giving three choices to the reader and they use the particle *or* twice as in the following example: *Do you prefer Al Hassan or Al Hussain or Ibn Al Hanafiya?* Moreover, the student must concentrate on the verb *tufadhil* which comes immediately after the first part of alternative question which can be considered a reference to that the choice must be between two and not three. All in all, most of students are not lucky in rendering this sentence. In sum, the following translation is most acceptable: *Do you prefer Al Hassan and Al Hussain or Ibn Al Hanafiya?*

**Sentence 6:**

أ ذاهب أنت غدا إلى دمشق أم ذاهب إلى حلب؟
In this sentence, the speaker repeats the same word after *or* which is ḍhāhibun ḍāḥib and all students translate this sentence literally into: *Are you going tomorrow to Damascus or going to Aleppo?* In Arabic this type of words is an adverb of time which is derived from the verb. However, they repeat the word going after or too and this is undesirable in English because it is a type of redundancy. Furthermore, they are confused in using the word *tomorrow* in the beginning, in the middle or in the last of the sentence. Finally, the appropriate rendering is *Are you going to Damascus or Aleppo Tomorrow?*

**Sentence 7:**

أراكبا جئت أم ماشي؟

This is another type of adverbs which is an adverb of manner after *the* two parts of alternative question. Also, all students were unlucky in translating these two adverbs literally rakiban and mashian راكبا وماشيا into walking and riding and many other on foot& walking respectively and that is unacceptable since the two parts of alternative question must be the same part of speech. Overall. All of the students use different question words as: did, do, have. without concentrating on the time of the verb. All in all, one of the students renders this sentence correctly into *Did you come by car or by foot?*

**Sentence 8:**

أ انت فعلت هذا أم يوسف؟

It seems from the renderings of the students that this structure is easy in Arabic context because most of them nearly 9 translate the question mark al Hamza into *Did* and that is right since the verb in the past tense which is فعلت. Also, other students were confused between Did, Are, Do, or Have because they lack the appropriate way of translating tenses and this is one of the biggest grammatical mistakes in translation. Again, one of the students turns yes /no question into wh question as is the following rendering: Who did this, you or Yousef? Moreover, another student tries to repeat the same verb after al Hamza into Did you do this or Yousef did it? The best rendering is: *Did you did this or Yousef?*

**Sentence 9:**

أ تحب القهوة أم الحليب؟

The second particle of alternative question am in Arabic must be followed by the same part of speech just like that after al Hamza, but in this sentence the speaker omits the second part because of brevity. The exact context here is: أ تحب القهوة أم تحب الحليب تُحب القهوة أم تحب الحليب. In translation, all students except one translate this sentence into *Do you like coffee or milk?* In fact, they do correct as well as English language don’t like redundancy. One of
the students gives politer translation by saying *would you like coffee or tea?* Certainly this depends upon the context of situation. Summing up, these last translations are the best ones for the English context.

**Sentence10:**

أ رواية قرأ أم مسرحية؟

? rewaitan kara’ata am masrahiatan?

Both parts of alternative question in this sentence are followed by nouns as in: & رواية riwatan and مسرحية masrahiatan respectively. In translation, most of the students translate this sentence into *Did you read a novel or a play?* In fact, their translations are correct but weak in tense since students are confused whether to use past, present, or present perfect. One of them only tries to translate it literally without question mark at all into *A novel you read or drama?* This is certainly wrong rendering. Thus, *Did you read a novel or a play?* is The most appropriate one.

**Conclusions**

Based on students’ performance, the researchers have arrived at a conclusion that Arabic alternative questions structures are similar to the structure of alternative questions in English. Logically, Arabic alternative questions can be used in contexts to show attention, affirmation and equalization. Whereas English alternative questions are used to ask for information, offering and suggestion. The alternative question has come to be shown when there is a choice between two or more items in the same structure. The main problem faced by the students is not in translating particle itself but in translating tenses before and after the second part of alternative questions which is ‘am’ since the first tense is different from the second one. As we know that is wrong because both tenses must be the same. Thus, the hypothesis of the current study is proved. Finally, the researchers recommend the syllabus designers to focus on the AQs and students also should be aware when they translate any phenomenon from their mother tongue to foreign languages. Moreover, the researchers suggest other linguists or researchers to focus on the question formation in the colloquial dialects such as Iraqi Arabic Dialects.

**REFERENCES**


**Appendix**

The following samples represent 3rd year students answers in English to some Arabic alternative questions at the English Department, College of Education, University of Al Hamdaniya, 2019.

**Samples of Students Performance, The sentences and their translations:**

1- أ زيد في الدار أم عمر؟
Is Zaid in home or Omro?
Is Zaid home or amro?
Who is at home, Zaid or Amro?
Is Zaid in the house or Omar?
Are Zaid in home or Amro?
Is Zaid in the house or Amro?
Is Zaid in the house or Amro?
Is Zaid at home or Amr/
It was Zaid in the house or Amro?
Is zaid in the house or Omer?
Did Zaid in house or Amr?
Is Zaid in house or Amro?
Is Zaid in house or Amro?
Does Zaid or Omro at home?
Who is in the room Zaid or Omer?
Is that Zaid in house or Amro?

I don’t know whether to eat or drink?
I don’t know whether to eat or drink?
I don’t know whether to eat or drink?
I don’t know whether to eat or drink?
I don’t know, may I eat or drink?
I don’t know eat or drink?
I don’t know eat or drink?
I don’t know eat or drink?
I don’t know eat or drink?
I don’t know eat or drink?
I don’t know eat or drink?
I don’t know eat or drink?
I don’t know eat or drink?
I don’t know eat or drink?
I don’t know eat or drink?
I don’t know eat or drink?
I don’t know eat or drink?
I don’t know eat or drink?

Who participate in the poetry night – you or your friend?
Are you a participant in the poetry evening or your friend?
Are you involved in poetry evening?
Are you take part in square of lattice or your friend?
Are you involved in the poetry evening or your friend?
Do you participate in the poetry or your friend?
Are you participated in the poetry reading or your friend?
Are you participate in the poetry evening or your friend?
Do you participate the descendants of the poets or your friend?
Did you participate in the evening of poetry or your friend?
Are you participate in poetry evening or you friend?
Who participates in the poetry night –you or your friend?
Are you participant or your friend in poetry festival?
Are you participate in the poetic poetry or your friend?
You participant in poetry night or your friend?

Do you agree with this matter or refuse it?
Do you want it or are you obligated to do it?
Do you want this or not?
Do you like the matter or disincline?
Do you want it or not?
Do you want it or not?
Do you want the matter or not?
Are you willing or don’t willing to do it?
You are willing in this subject or willing not?
Are you willing or willing to do?
Do you agree with this matter or refuse it?
Do you agree with this matter or refuse it?
Do you desire that or not?
Are you prefer this thing or disprefer?
Do you willing in order or willing about?

5- أ لحسن أم الحسين أم ابن الحنفية؟
Do you prefer Al-Hassan and Al-Hussain or Ibn Al Hanafiya?
Al Hasan and Al Husain do you prefer or Ibn Hanafiyyah?
Al-Hasan and Al Husain do you prefer or Ibn Hanafiyyah?
Do you prefer Al Hassan & Al Hussain or Ibn Al Hanafia
Al- Hassan or Al- Hussain prefer or Ebn AL- Hanafia?
Hassan or Hussain prefer or Ebn Al- Hanafia?
Do you prefer Al Hassan or Al Hussain or Abn Al hanafia?
Do you prefer AL- Hassan or Al Hussain or Ibn Al Hanafia?
Do you prefer Al- Hassan or Al- Hussain or Abn Al- Hanafi?
Hassan or Hussein preferred or Ibn al- Hanafi?
Are you prefer Hassan and Hussein or Ibn Al- Hanafia?
Are you prefer Hasan and Hussein or Ibn Al- Hanafia?
Do you prefer ALhassan or Al Hssein or Ibn Al Hanafia?
Are you prefer Al Hasan or or the born of Al Hanafia?
Al Hasan or Al Hussein you like or Ibn al- Hanafi?

6- أ ذاهب انت غدا الى دمشق أم ذاهب الى حلب؟
Are you going to Damascus tomorrow or going to Aleppo?
Where are you going, Damascus or Aleppo?
Are you going to Damascus or going to Aleppo tomorrow?
Tomorrow are you going to Damascus or to Aleppo?
Are you going to Damascus or Aleppo tomorrow?
Are you going to Damascus tomorrow or going to Halab?
Are you going to Damascus or Halab tomorrow?
Are you going to Damascus or Aleppo tomorrow?
Are you going to Damascus tomorrow or going to Aleppo?
Are you going tomorrow to Damascus or Halab?
Are you going to Damascus tomorrow or going to Aleppo?
Are you going to Damascus tomorrow or Halab?
Do you go to Damascus or Halab tomorrow?
Are you went tomorrow to Damascus or Aleppo?
Do you go to Damascus or Aleppo?

7- أ راكبا جئت أم ماشيا؟
Did you come riding or walking?
How did you come, riding or walking?
Did you was riding or walking when you came?
Did you come by a car or walking?
Are you come rider or walking?
Did you come by car or by foot?
Did you come by car or by walking?
have you came riding or walking?
Do you came a passenger or walked?
Do you come passenger or walker?
Are you coming on foot or walking?
Did you come by car or walking?
Did you come by car or walking?
Did you come passenger or walker?
Are you came by car or by feet?
Passenger you came or walking?

8. 8. أنت فعلت هذا أم يوسف؟
Who did this, you or Yousif?
Did you do this, or Yusuf?
Did you do this or Yousif did it?
Do you do this um Yousif?
Did you do this or Yousif?
Did you do that or Yousif?
Have you done this or Yousif?
Are you did this or Joseph?
Do you do this or Yousif?
Do you did it this or Yousif?
Did you do this or Yousif?
Did you do this or Yousif?
Did you do that or Yousif?
Are you doing this or Yousif?
Did you do this or Yousif?

9. 9. أ تحب القهءة أم الحليب؟
Do you like coffee or milk?
What do you like, coffee or milk?
Do you like coffee or milk?
Do you live coffee or milk?
Do you like coffee or milk?
Do you love coffee or milk
Do you like coffee or milk?
Do you like coffee or milk?
Do you like coffee or milk?
Do you like coffee or milk?
Do you like coffee or milk?
Would you like coffee or milk?

10. 10. رواية قرأت أم مسرحية؟
Have you read a novel or a play?
Have you read a novel or a play?
Did you read a novel or a play?
A novel you read or a play?
Did you read a novel or Drama?
Did you read novel or drama?
Did you read a novel or drama?
Did you read a novel or a play?
Do read Novel or Drama?
Are you read the novel or the play?
Did you read novel or drama?
Did you read a novel or drama?
Did you read a novel or drama?
A novel you read or drama?
Are you read novel or drama?