

Variation in Official Translations: Investigating the English Translation of Government Offices and Positions in Iraq¹

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Abstract

Official Translation refers to the translation of official signboards which are found on government offices. In Iraq, signboards tagged on most government offices show considerable variation regarding translation; two or more offices tackling the same business show two different translations, as in *College of Administration* vs. *College of Management*, taking into account that these two institutions do the same business. The same applies to words such as *Union*, *Federation* and *Association*. Variant appear these words to be, yet they are used interchangeably to refer almost to the same sort of business. This phenomenon is noticeable on the signboards of most offices across Iraq. The present paper elaborates on the state of current translations, suggests alternative translations, reaches certain conclusions and finally proposes some recommendations that may help solve this problem.

Key Words: Translation, Lexical Variation, Government Titles and Positions, Iraq Offices.

مستخلص

تشير الترجمة الرسمية إلى ترجمة التسميات الرسمية الموجودة على واجهات المؤسسات والمكاتب الحكومية للدلالة على نوع العمل في هذه المؤسسات وفي العراق تظهر تسميات المؤسسات تباينا ملحوظا في الترجمة؛ نجد مؤسستين تؤديان نفس العمل ولهما ترجمتين مختلفتين لهذا العمل كما الحال في (كلية الإدارة) التي تترجم *College of Management* وأحيانا *College of Administration* رغم أن كلاهما يقومان بنفس العمل وذات الشيء ينطبق على تسميات أخرى مثل (نقابة) فهي تتنوع في الترجمة: *Union* و *Federation* إلى *Association* ورغم اختلاف دلالة هذه التسميات إلى إنها تستعمل للإشارة إلى نفس المجال. تشيع تلك الظاهرة في ترجمة اغلب تسميات المؤسسات الرسمية في العراق بالرغم من أن اللغة المترجم إليها هي ذات اللغة وإن المؤسسات المعنية تؤدي نفس العمل. مع التواصل الواسع المجال الذي يشهده العراق حاليا في المجالات الثقافية والتجارية والاقتصادية وغيرها أضحت وجود ترجمات موحدة ودقيقة أمرا مطلوبا وإن الترجمات المتنوعة يمكن تجنبها عن طريق تبني ترجمات متفق عليها ويمكن لنقابة المترجمين وأقسام اللغة الانكليزية أو الترجمة وغيرها من المؤسسات ذات العلاقة أن تساهم في حل هذه المشكلة. يتعرض هذا البحث إلى الترجمات الحالية حيث يقترح ترجمات بديلة ويضع بعض الاستنتاجات وفي النهاية يطرح بعض التوصيات التي يمكن أن تساعد في حل هذه الإشكالية.

كلمات دالة: الترجمة، التنوع في الترجمة، تسميات المؤسسات والمناصب الحكومية، المؤسسات الرسمية في العراق

1. Subject Definition and Overview

Variation in translation means that two or more translations are given for a single piece of speech, discourse or language (Baker,1992:88; Levý,2011:33; & Urgese, 1984:39). In other words, that piece of discourse, whether it is a word, phrase, or sentence, is translated into different translations or phraseologies, given that the target language (TL) is the same for all these translations.

The reasons behind such variation has long been debated by linguists and specialists, and therefore this problem has been the concern of translators and linguists alike. The account for variation varies among linguists and specialists; some argue that the more synonymies a language has, the more varied translations will be. Others argue that the innovation on the part of some translators is likely to create new and different translations in the discourse related. Hansen (2003:77) and Bhatia (1993:172) point out that one of the reasons of variation in translation is the interlingual and intralingual differentiation. i.e., the existence of vocabulary items and words which co-refer to similar objects.

2. Background and Review of Related Studies

Variation in translation has been reported in the literature and previous studies, especially those related to English. Urgese (1984:49) reported a lot of variation in the French translations of popular and transactional texts having investigated selected texts written in English and French. Bell (1991:91) states that an utterance can be said or written in any language and recognized as a realization of a sentence of that particular language but the propositional meaning underpinning the utterance is universal rather than language-specific. He (ibid.) adds that stylistic conditions, such as discourse, medium, message, sender-receiver relationship, and context do affect the communication of a given code from the sender to the receiver.

Bhatia (1993:70) surveyed the English translations of certain texts of literature written in Bengali and Hindi and inferred that variation is inevitable and that it is sometimes language-specific. Hansen (2003:67) has revised the translation from Swedish into Danish and Norwegian, and concluded that no two translations are the same, because of multiplicity of the vocabulary related,

misconceptions on translations and intercultural diversity. Freddi (2006:12) has made a research on the English subtitling or translation of Italian-speaking movies, whereby he reported a lot of variations in the area studied.

Mattsson (2006:7) investigated linguistic variation in the subtitling of swearwords in commercial television in Sweden. She concluded that the factors affecting the subtitling process in Sweden decide how features such as swearwords and discourse markers are treated in this mode of translation. She found that both of these linguistic features are omitted to a large extent in all three target texts, and that the types/categories of features used are significantly influenced by the traditional way of using these words in Swedish written works and translations.

Hansen et al. (2007:55) have conducted a study on the German-English and English-German translations on a corpus of academic and periodical texts. They (ibid.) concluded that variation does exist when translating from German into English or vice versa in the texts mentioned. Hansen et al. (2007:90) focused on the Arabic-English translations in textbooks and manuals of language learning, and they (ibid.) maintained that synonymies, lexis and even the cultural content play a considerable role in the creation of variation.

Baumgarten and Özçetin (2008:293) studied the translation of business texts from German into English as they stated that German translations are influenced by their English source texts. They inferred that German translations differed from the German original texts, such that the German genre of business communication encompasses texts which linguistically resemble the English sister genre. They concluded that such variation shows the extent to which the English language influences German business communication. Sharkas (2009:23) investigated the translation of biological and medical terms from English into Standard Arabic in a few scientific texts, and she suggested that lack of proper vocabulary on the part of either language causes various translations.

Kerremans (2009:23) studied terminological variation in the bilingual dictionaries and glossaries written in English, French and Dutch. He found that certain patterns or tendencies can be derived from a comparative analysis of terminological variation in source texts and their translations. He also found that specialized translations contain at least as many terminological variants for a

given unit of understanding as in the source texts or even more. Rosa (2012) studied linguistic variation as a problem posed by linguistic factors, and in particular by the relation between discourse and place. She suggested several major strategies for the translation of such literary pseudo varieties.

3. Investigation of Current Translations

Most official translations are characterized by a remarkable and considerable variation with respect to the vocabulary items used. These translations are such varied due to a set of factors that affect the phrasing of that translation. Recently, it has been found out that the titles of government offices in Iraq show a noticeable variation with respect to form or lexis. One can see that two offices engaged in the same business have their titles translated differently. Of these examples are *College of Administration* vs. *College of Management*, even though both colleges specialize in the same major. Also, *Faculty* is translated *of Languages* vs. *College of Arts*, where كلية differently (Sharkas, 2009:12).

The word كلية *kulliye* is translated as *College* and sometimes as *Faculty*.² *College* is very broad, especially in European and American academics as it means a university that involves schools and institutes. On the other hand, *Faculty* refers mainly to the teaching body in a given school or university.

The two former terms are commonly used in the registers related, hence: *Faculty of languages*; *College of Education*. *Faculty* is almost used with humanities; *Faculty of Arts*, *Faculty of Languages*, *Faculty of Law*..etc., whereas *College* is used with humanities, science and other disciplines e.g. *College of Science*, *College of Education*, and *College of Economics* (Sanders et al., 2007:8).

4. Possible Factors

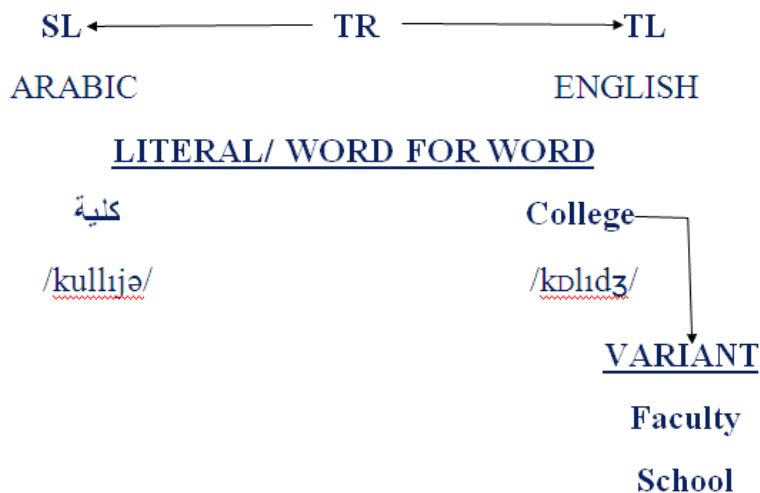
There is a set of factors that are thought to have been the possible motivator of variation. Of these is mental representation of words. Such representation plays a significant role in the creation of variation. It depends basically on the lexical formation of mental conceptions or formulations of the perceived entities. As early as 1978, Beaugrande (1978:25) argued that "The basis of the act of translation is not the original text, but rather the representation of the text that is eventually generated in the translator's mind." He (ibid.) goes on to explain that

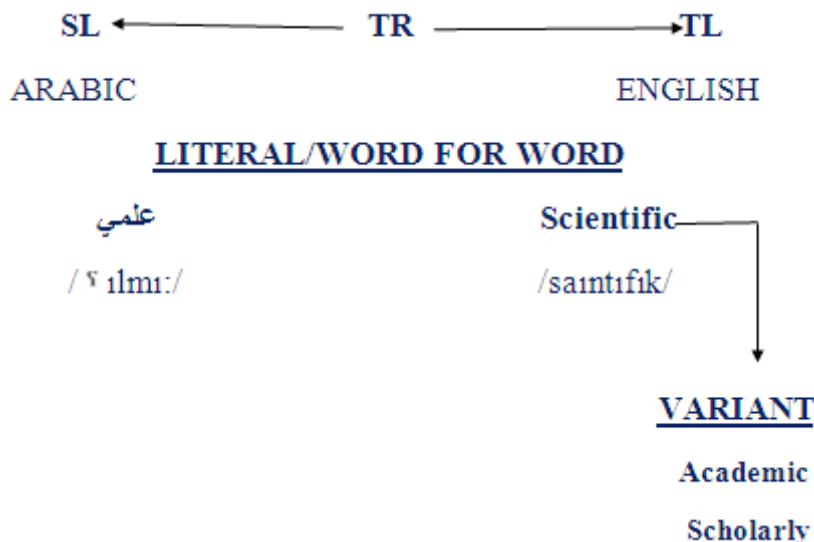
"the mental representation of the text that is finally registered in the translator's mind is not identical with the original text" because the translator's reading "may well have led to a redistribution of prominence within the text".

Johnson-Laird (1987:189) maintained that "the recognition of words is seldom an end in itself, because listeners want to understand what they hear. Lexical meanings are the ingredients from which the sense of an utterance is made up, and its syntactic structure is the recipe by which they are combined."

Wu (2002:534) states that " There seems to be an uncontroversial observation that a translator is both free and constrained in a translating task. " Following Beaugrande's discussion (1978), one may quite argue that a translator is free in generating a mental representation of the SL and that s/he is constrained in presenting in the target language what has been generated in his/her mental representation. Fig. (1) below shows the formation of mental representation in translation.

Fig. (1) Mental Formation of Variant Translations





SL= Source

T=Target Language

T=Translation

Fig. (1) above shows the mental formation of the translation of (كلية) *Kulliyeh*, where the face value form of this word is the counterpart in the TL, which explains the use of *College* rather than the other variants. In other words, when translating, the mental conception is the first form the translator produces in the TL. The same applies to other cases in which the lexical form in the TL plays a significant role in the production of variation-where other translators will resort to *Faculty* or *School* when they translate the same word to English.

علمية *ilmiye* is used loosely in translation. It is used in such as *Scientific Conference*, *Scientific Journal*, *Scientific Library*, *Scientific Affairs* and the like. *Scientific* proper denotes pure and applied sciences and the translations above are not accurate because they hold the meaning at a face value, just because the counterpart of this word in Arabic is the same (Biber, 1999:133). This can be avoided by using words such as *Academic* or *Scholarly* because conferences, magazines or university sections or departments are not involved in science-based activities only. Conferences, libraries and journals are not science-

dedicated, they involve many disciplines and areas unless otherwise they are dedicated to a specific field as in *Humanities Journal*, where the journal in this sense is limited to *Humanities*, as the opposite to *Sciences*.

(إدارة) *Idare* is translated either as *management* or *administration*. This is due to the misconception held about this word in English. Non-native speakers find that both words mean the same as they are not different in reference. It is this which creates variable translations, such as *College of Management* and *College of Administration*.

The word (دائرة) *Da?ire* has several translations being used in government businesses; it is translated as *Office*, *Department* and *Directorate*. The reason behind this might be the fact that these words are apparently mistaken for synonymous words, even though they are not as such. When that word is translated into these three words, the functional meaning of that word will be retained. Thus these translations can be used interchangeably.

معاون العميد *Mu9awin 9emeed* is *Assistant Dean*, which is wrong. *Assistant* suggests that there are two *Deans* and not one, as it is in *Assistant Director* in film-making where two directors co-direct a movie.

term but موظف *MuweDDef* is translated into *Government Worker* or *Employee*, *worker* does not necessarily refer to people working in state-run businesses only, as it also refers to those working in private or non-government businesses, this then makes it more restrictive than *Employee*. Therefore, *Civil Servant* would be more comprehensive in translation than the two previous terms and it is also the term used in the global offices related (Habash et al., 2007:125).

المكتبة العلمية الافتراضية is translated as *Virtual Science Library* and is abbreviated as (VSL), which is not accurate and the required translation would be *Virtual Academic Library* (VAL) or *Virtual Scholarly Library* (VSL).

Translation of bilingual IDs, or the government IDs that appear in English and Arabic, carry a lot of pitfalls or errors in phraseology. For example, *Names* are ill-translated,

الاسم الرباعي *Isim Ruba9ee* is translated as *Quadruple Name*, which is wrong. It can be translated as *Full Name* or *First, Second,(and) Third* فصيلة الدم hence *Fesilet Name(s)*.

Dem is translated as *Blood Type* and *Blood Group*, and the latter, but not the former, is the common term.

the term وظيفة *WeDeefa* is translated as *Job, Position, Work Type* and

Occupation. The multiple translations can be avoided by adopting a single term and it is left to translators to choose the term that best fits the Arabic counterpart.

شؤون علمية *Shu?uun 9ilmiye* is translated as *Scientific Affairs*. It can be rendered

Academic Affairs to achieve accuracy in translation. The computer proficiency known as *IC3*, is شهادة قيادة الحاسوب test, while *IC3* stands for *Internet and* translated as *Computing Core Certification* (Wikipedia, 2011:2). An appropriate the above abbreviation would be شهادة أساسيات الحاسوب والانترنت translation for the

5. Study Findings

The study has reached the following results:

1. Variation in translation may be attributed to the presence of synonyms and near-synonyms at the translator's disposition. These synonyms represent the only variants in translation.
2. There are other factors that lead to variation in translation from SL to TL, such as lexical counterparts, equivalence, and correspondence in meaning.

6. Recommendations

The following are some recommendations put forward to help solve the problem of variant translations:

1. Departments of English and/or Departments of Translation and the Iraqi Translators' Union can approve and set translations which are single, exact and unified.

2. Departments of English and/ or Departments of Translation found in the local universities may establish some consulting offices the job of which is to issue certified translations to the local government offices when necessary.

3. Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research may play a considerable role in this respect being the highest academic authority in the country. The Ministry mentioned may establish an institution or a centre that specializes in delivering certified translations to all offices, private and public, that need its business titles to have translated into English.

4. Government offices may seek the aid of the said bodies in the translation of its titles.

7. Conclusions

In the light of the discussions stated above, the following conclusions have been reached:

1. Translation of government and official business titles and positions shows a noticeable variation in terms of lexicology.

2. Creativity on the part of translators, the existence of synonymies, the ill-use of certain vocabulary items, and the lack of reliable translations are the factors that likely trigger variation in such translations.

3. Government offices and businesses often seek translation from unreliable or non-certified sources, which therefore results in variable translations.

4. The absence of single and approved translations among the translators and the bodies related makes variation the norm rather than the exception.

8. Further Areas of Research

1. There are a few words in Arabic related to positions and that have so far no or single translation, particularly those such as **نقيب الصحفيين**, **نقيب** accurate and **نقيب الأطباء** headed with. These titles need to be considered as to translation. **نقيب المعلمين، المهندسين**

Further, titles of the administrative divisions need to be accounted for in translation. example, **محافظه** For has two different translations; *Governorate* and *Province*, the word

which adds a further significance to this area of study.

2. The current paper has focused on the translation of governmental or official businesses and offices. However, a further study can tackle the English version of governmental and official transactions, *the written ones*, to show relevance and variation in the translation of these transactions.

3. A further study can be conducted on the role of synonyms in English-Arabic translations.

4. Variation may be attributed to the contrast of meaning between ostensibility and opaqueness, which is another factor that needs to be investigated in order to account for variation.

NOTES:

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²Transliteration will be used here whenever an Arabic title or word is mentioned, to show the phonological and lexical significance of the words under study.

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APPENDIX: Some Proposed Translations Compared with the Current Translations. Index (1)

no	Title	Current Translation	Proposed Translation	Remarks
1	معاون العميد	<i>Assistant dean</i>	<i>Vice-Dean</i>	The position is for one person only and <i>assistant-dean</i> implies that there are two deans, as, for example, in <i>assistant-director</i> in film-making, where more than one <i>director</i> co-direct a film. <i>Sub-Dean</i> serves the same purpose and it is also used, but it is not as common as <i>Vice-Dean</i> .
2	رئيس الجامعة	<i>President</i>	<i>Chancellor</i>	<i>Chancellor</i> is used to refer to that position in many universities around the world
3	مساعد رئيس الجامعة	<i>Assistant President</i>	<i>Vice-Chancellor</i>	See Note No. 1 above
4	الشؤون العلمية	<i>Scientific Affairs</i>	<i>Academic Affairs</i> or <i>Academics</i> only	Whether in colleges of education/arts and/or similar disciplines, or these of science, this position is concerned with how departments work, examinations, students' activities. etc; it is not restricted to science(s) proper.
5	المكتبة العلمية الافتراضية	<i>VSL; Virtual Science Library</i>	<i>Virtual Academic Library / Virtual Scholarly Library / Virtual Library</i>	Libraries, in general, involve many fields, disciplines and majors and they are not restricted to sciences only.
6	علاقات عامة	<i>Public Affairs/ Public Relations</i>	<i>Public Affairs</i>	<i>Affairs</i> is more common than <i>relations</i>

7	موظف	<i>Government worker/ employee</i>	<i>Civil servant</i>	The personnel who work for government offices are called <i>servants</i> , since they deliver services for the public. There is also <i>military service</i> and <i>secret service</i> .
8	كلية	<i>College/faculty</i>	<i>College / School</i>	<i>Faculty</i> is principally concerned with the teaching body in a college, school or institute, even though it is sometimes used in lieu of <i>college</i> but in a very narrowed sense, as in <i>faculty of law/of arts</i> . <i>Colleges</i> are sometimes known as <i>schools</i> due to the similarities found between the latter and the former.
9	رئاسة جامعة	<i>Presidency</i>	<i>Chancellery</i>	See Note N.2 above
10	محافظة	<i>Province / Governorate</i>	<i>Province</i>	The term is used in referring to grand towns
11	كلية الإدارة	<i>College of administration/college of management</i>	<i>College of management</i>	This term is used in most global universities

Index (2)

N	Title	Current Translation	Proposed Translation	Remarks
١٢	مؤتمر علمي	<i>Scientific Conference</i>	<i>Academic conference/ Academic Convention / Conference or Convention only</i>	This is justified by the fact that a conference in a multi-disciplinary college or university, unless otherwise it is a college/institute of science, may cover a wide range of majors; humanities, economics and other social sciences, and it is not necessarily restricted to scientific majors.
13	المكتبة الالكترونية	<i>Electronic library</i>	<i>E-Library</i>	The prefix E- has become the fashion in referring to network-based exchanges and businesses, hence <i>e-mail</i> , <i>e-signature</i> , <i>e-commerce</i> , ..etc
14	مدير عام	<i>General Director/ General Manager</i>	<i>Director general /Manager General</i>	Postposed adjectives are used in the designation of many titles, positions and chairs. e.g. <i>post master general</i> and <i>brigadier general</i> .
15	دائرة	<i>Office/ Department / Directorate</i>	<i>Office only</i>	Government-run departments and divisions are often referred to as <i>offices</i> , as this term covers many businesses
16	الاسم الرباعي	<i>Quadruple name</i>	<i>Full-name/ first-second-middle-last name(s)</i>	<i>Quadruple</i> indicates a form or appearance rather than content
17	الكلية التقنية	<i>Technical College</i>	<i>Polytechnic</i>	<i>Polytechnic</i> is a college, school or institute with different, often applied, departments. This word is a noun and not adjective, and thus it needs not to be postmodified by <i>College</i> or <i>Institute</i> .
١٨	الاتحاد العام للأدباء والكتاب في العراق	<i>The Union of Iraqi Writers</i>	<i>The Iraqi General Union of Writers and Litterateurs</i>	The current translation gives no clue to two parts mentioned in SL: الأدباء and العام

19	جسر بغداد الكبير	<i>Big Baghdad Bridge</i>	<i>Baghdad Grand Bridge</i>	Noun phrases headed by proper nouns have these nouns put initially then the other phrases e.g. <i>Harvard Student Union.Grand</i> , and not <i>big</i> , is used in reference to geographical or locative designations. e.g. <i>The Grand Canyon</i> .
20	اقتصاد	<i>Economy in general / economics as a discipline</i>	<i>Business</i>	<i>Business</i> is now the widest and is most accepted in use having covered both <i>economy</i> and <i>economics</i> ; thus <i>Global Business</i> , <i>School of Business</i> .
21	مركز المدينة	<i>City Centre</i>	<i>Metropolis/ Downtown</i>	The proposed translations may serve the job, since they are single words rather than multiple-phrases
٢٢	نقيب المعلمين	No current trans. available	<i>Chief Teacher/ Head Teacher</i>	In UK, <i>Head Teacher</i> is the teacher who is in charge of other teachers
٢٣	نقابة	Association / federation/	<i>Union</i>	This term is more inclusive than the previous ones

التباين في الترجمة الرسمية: تقصي الترجمة الانجليزية لغاوين بعض المؤسسات والمناصب الحكومية في العراق

تشير الترجمة الرسمية إلى ترجمة التسميات الرسمية الموجودة على واجهات المؤسسات والمكاتب الحكومية للدلالة على نوع العمل الخاص بهذه المؤسسات وفي العراق تظهر تسميات المؤسسات تباينا ملحوظا في الترجمة. في هذا السياق نجد مؤسستين تؤديان نفس العمل تقدمان ترجمتين مختلفتين لهذا العمل كما هو الحال في (كَلِيَّةُ الإدارة) التي تترجم *College of Management* وأحيانا إلى *College of Administration* رغم أن كلاهما تقومان بنفس العمل وذات الأمر ينطبق على تسميات أخرى مثل كلمة (نقابة) إذ تتنوع في الترجمة من *Union* و *Federation* إلى *Association* ورغم اختلاف دلالة هذه التسميات إلا إنها تستعمل للإشارة إلى ذات المجال. إن تلك الظاهرة هي شائعة الوجود في ترجمة أغلب تسميات المؤسسات الرسمية في العراق رغم أن اللغة المترجم إليها هي ذات اللغة وإن المؤسسات المعنية تؤدي نفس العمل ونظرا للانفتاح الذي يشهده العراق حاليا في مختلف المجالات الثقافية والتجارية والاقتصادية وغيرها فأن وجود ترجمات موحدة ودقيقة أضحي أمر مطلوب وإن الترجمات المتنوعة يمكن تجنبها عن طريق إيجاد ترجمات متفق عليها. يمكن أن تضطلع نقابة المترجمين وغيرها من المؤسسات ذات العلاقة بدور مهم من أجل حل هذه المشكلة. يتناول هذا البحث التباين في الترجمة بوصفها ظاهرة متداولة في الترجمة فيتطرق في البداية إلى تعريف التباين بوصفها الاختلاف في ترجمة مصطلح من اللغة المصدر *Source Language* إلى اللغة المستهدفة *Target Language* مع استعراض الدراسات السابقة التي تناولت موضوع التباين في الترجمة بعد ذلك يناقش البحث الترجمات الحالية الخاصة بالمؤسسات والمناصب الحكومية المذكورة أعلاه ولحل هذه المسألة يضع الباحث بعض التوصيات إلى جانب بعض الاستنتاجات إضافة إلى ملحق بالترجمات المقترحة مع مقارنتها بالترجمات الحالية.

أهم النتائج التي توصل إليها البحث:

١. وجود تباين كبير في اختيار المصطلح المناسب للترجمة من المصدر *Source Language* إلى اللغة المستهدفة *Target Language*.
٢. لجوء المؤسسات المعنية إلى الترجمة من مصادر غير جيدة أو قليلة الخبرة.
٣. يلعب غياب المصطلحات الموحدة بين المترجمين دورا في زيادة هذا التباين.

التوصيات المقترحة:

١. ضرورة قيام نقابة المترجمين بتوحيد المصطلحات من أجل اعتمادها في الترجمة.
٢. يمكن أن تلعب أقسام اللغة الانجليزية أو الترجمة الموجودة في الجامعات دور مهم في رفق حاجة الجهات المعنية بالترجمات المطلوبة الخاصة بأغراض تلك الجهات.