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Forth Stage/ Translation

Translation of Sentence Types: NOMINAL VS. VERBAL SENTENCES

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There are two major types of sentence, nominal and verbal. One of the main differences between English and Arabic grammar is that English has verbal sentences only (in the sense that every grammatical English sentence should contain a main verb), whereas Arabic has both verbal and nominal sentences. A nominal sentence requires no verb of any kind. In general, it consists of two nouns, the first is called 'Topic/Subject' (المبتدأ \المسند اليه)) , and the second is called 'Comment /Predicate'(الخبر\ المسند)) . Although English sentences start with a noun, this noun is called 'subject' (الفاعل \ المسند) followed by the main verb (الفعل) of the sentence and an object, or a اليه) complement (the last three categories are called 'Predicate' (المسند)) . There is no English sentence that can be described as grammatically well-formed unless it contains a main verb (an auxiliary verb is not enough, there must be a main/lexical verb), what is known in Arabic as 'verb', for there are no auxiliaries in its grammar. In this sense, if English sentences were translated in the same word order, there would be no verbal sentences in Arabic, only nominal sentences. Here is a short list with the main sentence types in Arabic:

a. Verbal Sentences (V+S+O/C)

b. Nominal Sentences (Topic+Comment)

c. Functional Sentences الجمل التي لها محل من الاعراب (seven types).

d. Non-Functional sentences الجمل التي لا محل لهل من الاعراب (nine types).

There are variations on (Nominal (a-d) and verbal (e-h)) sentence types: e.g.

a. 'Inna sentences إن : جملة ان واخواتها) (set of semi-verbal particles + a sentence (a particle of the set+topic (accusative) + comment (nominative)).

b. Prepositional sentence type (جملة الجار والمجرور) : A prepositional phrase pertaining to an embedded comment, followed by a belated topic.

c. Adverbial sentence type (الجملة الظرفية): An adverb of time/place related to an embedded comment, followed by a belated topic.

d. Fronted comment and belated topic sentence type جملة تقديم الخبر

e. Passive voice sentence type جملة المبني للمجهول

f. Fronted Object+V+O sentence type (جملة المبني للمجهول) : An embedded verb+O+V+O

g. 'Kaana' sentence (جملة كان واخواتها) set of so-called 'defective/imperfective verbs'+sentence (a verb of this set+topic (nominative)+comment (accusative)).

h. Conditional sentences الجمل الشرطية : A conditional particle (e.g. اذا \او \ لولا \ ان \ من ، الخ) +topic+V, or V+S+O/C. etc. (See Alghalayeeni (1999)).

i. Imperative sentence type جملة صيغة الامر

Thus, there is a considerable difference of sentence types between the two languages. Such difference causes some problems for students of translation:

Problem 1: The absence of topic-comment/predicate nominal sentences:

Since all sentences have main verbs in English, students might wrongly think that they have to be translated equally with verbs into Arabic, keeping to the same English word order. Consequently, this may produce awkward Arabic noun-verb nominal sentences: e. g.

1. "I am a student" انا اكون طالبا

2. "The president is ill" الرئيس يكون مريضا

3. "Our neighbours are good": جيراننا يكونون طيبين

(Many students produce still more awakward Arabic grammar by using the colloquial, broken forms: (يكونوا ، مريض، طالب) instead of the grammatical forms: يكونون ، مريضا ، طالبا used here.)

4. "She has a headache": هي تملك صداعا

5. "We have money": نحن نملك نقودا

6. "You have many friends": انت تملك اصدقاء كثيرين

Solution: Verbs "Be" and "Have" in the present:→ nominal sentences:

When "am", "is", and "are" are used as main verbs, their sentences are nominal in Arabic. Therefore, they are deleted completely in Arabic. They have the function of the mathematical symbol, equals . By applying this to the first three examples above, the following translations can be suggested:

1. "I=a student" انا طالب ا→ = انا طالب (انا طالب

2. "The president=ill":

الرئيس مريض → الرئيس = مريض

3. "Our neighbours=good":

جيراننا طيبون → جيراننا = طيبون

Verb "have" is also used as a main verb in the two forms "have, and „has", and can be translated into a verbal, or a nominal construction. The following retranslation of the examples 4-6 above illustrates the point:

4. "She has a headache": عندها صداع

5. "We have money": في حوزتنا نقود \ معنا نقود \ عندنا نقود

6. "You have many friends": عندك اصدقاء كثر

Hence, the English verbal sentences become nominal sentences in Arabic, having a topic and a comment instead of a subject and a verb.

Problem "2": The confusion of the present with past tenses of "Be" and "Have":

Problem "2" is caused by confusing the solution to the first problem to be applied by some students to the translation of these two verbs in the past tense as well (i.e. translating sentences into nominal constructions of 'topic and comment/subject and predicate' in Arabic). However, the past tense of 'Be' and 'Have' are translated into verbal sentences(verb+subject) in Arabic, thus retaining the past tense of verbs and sentences.

Solution: Verbs "Be and "Have" in the past→verbal sentences:

When "was", "were" and "had" are used, they should be translated as verbs in the past, as the following examples show:

1. "He was in the hospital last week": كان في المستشفى في الاسبوع الماضي

2. "The players were ready for the match": كان اللاعبون جاهزين للمباراة

3. "We had some problems there": كان عندنا بعض المشاكل هناك

  Clearly, the common verb in these examples is (كان). Therefore, it is not common here to change the verbal structure into a nominal structure in Arabic, unless the tense of verb is ignored, which is not advisable.