
Using Translation as a Tool to Explore Libyan EFL Students' Understanding of How Questions and Negatives were Formed in Early Modern English

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Abstract:

The study aims to investigate the syntactic problems that may face Libyan EFL students at Misurata University, because of the absence of auxiliary do in negatives and questions in works written during the Elizabethan era by Shakespeare. The participants were 33 students enrolled in the last semesters in the Department of English and the instrument used to collect data was a simple translation test in which students were asked to translate short statements quoted from some of Shakespeare's plays into Arabic language in order to evaluate students' ability to understand negative sentences and questions regardless of the absence of the do support. The findings revealed that the majority of students had sufficient ability to comprehend the different syntactic structures of Early Modern English in which periphrastic do was sometimes missed.

Key Words: Translation, EFL Students, Early Modern English, *do* Support.

استخدام الترجمة كأداة لاستكشاف مدى استيعاب الطلبة الليبيين الدارسين للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية للأسئلة والجمل المنفية في مرحلة الإنجليزية

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الملخص:

تهدف الدراسة إلى تقصي المشكلات النحوية التي قد تواجه الطلاب الليبيين الدارسين للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في جامعة مصراتة، بسبب غياب الفعل المساعد في الجمل المنفية والأسئلة في الأعمال التي كتبها شكسبير خلال العصر الإليزابيثي أو العصر الذي يصنف على أنه المرحلة المبكرة من الإنجليزية الحديثة.

يشارك في هذه الدراسة 33 طالبًا مسجلين في الفصول الدراسية الأخيرة في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية بكلية الآداب، وكانت الأداة التي استخدمت لجمع البيانات هي عبارة عن اختبار ترجمة بسيط طلب فيه من الطلاب ترجمة عبارات قصيرة مقتبسة من بعض مسرحيات شكسبير إلى اللغة العربية، من أجل تقييم قدرة الطلاب على التعرف على الجمل المنفية والأسئلة على الرغم من تكوينها بدون استخدام الفعل المساعد في تلك الفترة. كشفت النتائج أن غالبية الطلاب كان لديهم القدرة الكافية على فهم التركيبات النحوية على الرغم من افتقارها لوجود الفعل المساعد كما أكدت على فعالية استخدام الترجمة من اللغة الأجنبية إلى اللغة الأم كوسيلة لاختبار فهم الطلبة للتركيبات النحوية في اللغة الأجنبية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الترجمة، الطلبة الدارسين للغة الإنجليزية، مرحلة الإنجليزية الحديثة

المبكرة، غياب الفعل المساعد.

1. Introduction:

All languages evolve over time, resulting in a number of changes. English language is one of these languages which witnessed noticeable changes throughout history (McMahon, 1994). Numerous developments, both gains

and losses, occurred especially during the Early Modern English period (1500–1700). During this period, steps towards Standard English were taken. The works of William Shakespeare (1564–1616) were written during that period, and perhaps one could regard his works as a typical example of the language of that period.

Understanding Shakespeare's impact on the development of English and culture is challenging. Shakespeare's diction clearly had an impact on the English language as he used new words to raise language standards while constructing his prose and poetry. He was one of the first writers to give the art of writing a new form. His plays and poetry were written in a distinctive way. Furthermore, the rules that he portrayed in his writings were adopted later in English literature. He gained popularity and influence as a literary character in the history of English language because of his contributions (Rao, 2018).

Shakespeare's plays and sonnets are taught as part of the English Literature curriculum in the majority if not all, English schools and colleges around the world. Students who have read Shakespeare's works are better able to understand how English language developed over time and they have a stronger contextual understanding. Studying such classic literature contributes to the expansion of the vocabulary and the understanding of other texts. Additionally, it helps to examine how English language's structure, grammar, and punctuation were developed and changed over time. Although it might not initially seem significant, this is undoubtedly helpful when students are faced with learning a new language or analyzing other texts (Murphy, Culpeper, Gillings & Pace-Sigge, 2020).

However, there is plenty of proof, that students' interactions with Shakespeare are frequently far from the enjoyable experiences one might hope for, with the language being the main offender. Shakespeare is challenging to teach and to learn because his plays use an older version of the English language from 400 years ago, and a lot has changed since then. Therefore, it is not surprising that a lot has been written about how to teach and learn Shakespeare (Murphy, Culpeper, Gillings & Pace-Sigge, 2020).

Despite the fact that the majority of the new grammatical items introduced in Early Modern English were auxiliaries, the use of *do* as an auxiliary was not yet obligatory in questions and negative sentences. Shakespeare, for example, did not use it constantly (van Gelderen, 2014). This study will investigate the problems that may face Libyan EFL students in the Faculty of Arts at Misurata University, because of the absence of auxiliary *do* in works written during the Elizabethan era by Shakespeare.

Research Questions:

The main goal of this study is to identify the ability of undergraduate EFL Libyan students to comprehend questions and negative sentences included in some of the Shakespearean plays by using a translation test as a tool to assess this comprehension and to answer the following questions:

1. Can the syntactic differences between questions and negatives in Early Modern English and in Modern English cause difficulties in understanding Shakespeare's language by the target group of Libyan EFL learners?
2. What are the difficulties that Libyan students may encounter during translating Shakespeare's questions and negatives formed without auxiliary *do* from English into Arabic?
3. Can the target group of Libyan EFL learners be able to identify Early Modern English negatives and questions formed without auxiliary *do*?

In answer to the previous questions, it is hypothesized that:

1. Syntactic differences between Early Modern English and Modern English (the absence of auxiliary verb *do* in this study) will make it difficult for Libyan EFL learners to understand Shakespeare's language.
2. Most EFL Libyan students will not be able to realize that the sentence is a question because it does not have the verb *do*.
3. Most EFL Libyan students will not be able to translate sentences which contain *not* as negative sentences because they do not have the verb *do*.
4. Most EFL students will not be able to translate negative interrogative sentences because they do not have the auxiliary verb *do*.

Review of Related Literature:

The beginnings of English language are traced back to 450 CE when people who spoke Germanic languages settled in Britain. According to Bede, the brothers Hengist and Horsa were asked by the Celtic-speaking King Vortigern to protect his British kingdom from invaders. The invited guests turned against Vortigern, and the Celtic and Latin that had previously been spoken there were gradually supplanted by Germanic (van Gelderen, 2018).

Therefore, beginning as a language separated from the rest of the Germanic linguistic area, it was in use for more than 1,500 years; and throughout its history, several periods can be identified (Riccio, 2004). However, three main periods can be distinguished, and like all historical divisions, the periods of the English language are matters of convenience, and the lines that separate them are purely arbitrary. But it is possible to identify some general characteristics and certain special developments that occur within each of the periods (Baugh & Cable 2002).

The period from 450 to 1150 is recognized as Old English and because of the fact that during most of this period English nouns, adjectives, and verb endings were preserved more or less unimpaired, it is sometimes defined as the period of full inflections. The period between 1150 and 1500 is known as Middle English. It is referred to as the period of leveled inflections because during this time the inflections, which had started to break down toward the end of the Old English period, were drastically reduced. Since 1500 the language is called Modern English. By the time we get to this point in the development of this language, a significant portion of the original inflectional system has completely vanished, so this period is referred to as the period of lost inflections. The gradual loss of inflections is just one of the changes that mark the evolution of English in its various stages of development (Baugh & Cable, 2002). However, each period can also be defined in terms of the distinctive features of phonology, grammar, and vocabulary that characterize it (Riccio, 2004).

Early Modern English:

Many historians further divide the Modern English period into Early and Late Modern English using 1700 as a dividing point (Nevalainen, 2006). Early Modern English - known as Shakespeare's English - is characterized by the writings of numerous notable authors, scientists, and thinkers (it suffices to mention a few of William Shakespeare's contemporaries, including Christopher Marlowe, Edmund Spenser, Francis Bacon, Richard Hakluyt, James Shirley, Philip Sidney, John Webster, Ben Jonson, Michael Drayton, and William Warner). This time is distinguished by the coexistence of several forms that are nearly identical in meaning; this was another chaotic stage in the development of the language when the choice of forms was influenced less by rigid rules and more by the authority of the form's user. The leaders had the freedom to make their own decisions, which allowed them to express themselves in a wide range of ways.

By this time, nearly all of the grammatical forms found in the language were formed; the major phonetic changes had already occurred; the ability to use any lexeme wherever possible was already developed. As far as its categories and structure are concerned, the English language was not changed in later years. Although the form of expression changed from century to century, it appears to be merely an object of stylistic analysis and the study of regional dialect variations and idiosyncrasies of the style of the authors.

A further more thorough examination of the language would highlight this period when the most educated people in the country worked on determining which words and word forms were appropriate in a civilized society. Through

countless publications of prescriptive grammar, dictionaries of correct English, etc., disputes regarding the grammaticality of various structures and forms, as well as the establishment of norms, the received standard in pronunciation as well as in grammar, were quite active. Moreover, during this period several of the popular and current forms were eliminated to make the language well-structured and logical (Ricchio, 2004).

Main Syntactic Features of Early Modern English:

Syntactically Early Modern English is more similar to Present-day English than Middle English in terms of phrase structure and word order. In this section, special attention will be paid to syntactic innovations particularly the rise of the auxiliary *do* (Nevalainen, 2006).

In contrast to the other auxiliaries, *do* is regularly introduced into the verb phrase in specific contexts in Present-day Standard English when there is no other auxiliary available. It is triggered by *not*-negation (*they **did** not find it*), by inversion, especially in questions (***did** they find it?*), and by emphasis (*they **DID** find it*). Moreover, it is used in reduced clauses as a prop word (*they found it, and we **did** too*) (Nevalainen, 2006).

The Early Modern English period saw the generalization of all these *do* usages. However, there was an interesting development in the usage of *do* in affirmative sentences that are not always emphatic (Nevalainen, 2006). *do* structure was preferable for three reasons: it was the same as the structure of sentences with an auxiliary; it kept the contact position V-O, and it clearly conveyed sentence negation (Görlach, 1991).

Although auxiliaries are introduced or developed during Early Modern English period, neither simple auxiliaries nor sequences of auxiliaries are as elaborate as those seen in Modern English (van Gelderen, 2014). During the Early Modern period, *do* initially spread to negative questions, then to affirmative questions and most negative statements as well as, to some extent, affirmative statements. The following examples from (1) to (4) clarify the use and nonuse of *do* in negative and affirmative questions in the sixteenth century (Nevalainen, 2006).

- (1) **Didst thou not** kill this king? (Shakespeare, *Richard III*).
- (2) **Heard you not** what an humble suppliant Lord Hastings was to her for his delivery? (Shakespeare, *Richard III*).
- (3) Why **do you look** on us and shake your head, and call us orphans, wretches, castaways, If that our noble father were alive? (Shakespeare, *Richard III*).
- (4) I promise you I scarcely know myself. **Hear you** the news abroad? (Shakespeare, *Richard III*).

Before the grammaticalization of *do*, its use was optional and therefore not fully predictable. The choice could depend on rhyme, and a great number of other factors (Görlach, 1991). By the end of the seventeenth century, auxiliary *do* became obligatory when asking questions, particularly in negative interrogatives. The process was slower in negative statements, reaching the frequency of roughly 60% of the cases at the end of the seventeenth century in the majority of verbs. Some verbs, like *doubt*, *know*, *mistake*, *trou* ('trust'), and *wot* ('know') took even longer to accept *do* than others (Nevalainen, 2006).

Difficulties in Understanding Shakespeare's Language:

William Shakespeare's language has always been regarded as being particularly difficult to grasp (Culea and Suciú 2019, Crystal 2019). Students tend to believe that Shakespearean plays are outdated and extremely challenging to comprehend. They frequently think that they won't understand anything when they attempt to read Shakespeare's works (Lewlen, 2019).

As a result of the difficulty of Shakespeare's language, a number of scholars have written a large number of articles, books, and speeches that are intended to simply teach people how to read it (Griffiths, 2000) (Crystal 2008& 2019) and (Culea and Suciú 2019). Shakespeare's original language is too frequently substituted in classrooms with No Fear Shakespeare or film versions by teachers who have given up on embracing this challenge.

People have been debating whether it is important to keep Shakespeare's works in their original form or to modernize them practically since the day of Shakespeare's passing. Although there is a wave of translation at the moment, we tend to look down on earlier translations of Shakespeare's works, such as Nahum Tate's *King Lear*. It seems that these directors have little faith in either their audiences or Shakespeare. Moreover, some scholars and audience members who have devoted a lot of time to studying Shakespeare worry that the projects of Shakespeare's plays' modernization will take away the satisfaction and sense of accomplishment that comes with understanding Shakespeare's original language.

However, Shakespeare's beauty is found in the strangeness and foreignness of his language. Shakespeare was not a skill these individuals were born with; they had to learn it. These scholars frequently hold the view that Shakespeare's original words must be preserved at all costs. People who prefer his original language do not want it to be made simpler for them. They take pleasure in hearing the words that have become familiar to them and experiencing the resonances of ambiguity in Shakespeare's discourse (Lewlen, 2019). Lewlen (ibid) is one of many researchers who support this point of view and encourage teaching students Shakespeare's works in the original language. For this reason,

this study was designed to figure out some of these obstacles that may hinder students' understanding of such language, especially the one that may be related to the absence of the verb *do*.

Related Studies:

A study was conducted by Murphy et al. (2020) to explore what students find difficult when they read Shakespeare and show the most useful pedagogical method for teaching Shakespeare's plays. The participants for this study were divided into two groups, one with English as a first language and one with English as a second language. The findings show similarities in the results between the two groups. The common areas of difficulty include archaic words, borrowing words, and coinage. This study suggests that a mixed pedagogical approach combining textual, contextual and performance approaches would be optimal in teaching Shakespeare's forward.

The similarity between that study and the current study is that the two studies use extracts from Shakespeare's plays to figure out the difficulties which students find while reading Shakespeare. However, the present study focuses only on the syntactic difficulties that students may find in understanding negatives and questions.

This syntactic aspect of Shakespeare's language was mentioned in another study done by Abugharsa (2021) to analyze the steady decline of verb movement and the growth of *do* support during the era of Early Modern English. The primary goal of the study was to determine if the development of *do* support during the history of the English language was more of a cause than a consequence of the loss of the characteristics of the verb-raising parameter. The results indicated that one of the variables that contributed to the loss of the verb-raising parameter in Early Modern English was the appearance of *do* support. The analyzed structures in that study were negative interrogative sentences taken from 30 Shakespeare's plays in the period of Early Modern English.

The current study is similar to the previously mentioned one in that both shed light on some extracts taken from Shakespeare's works to analyze some issues related to *do* support. The two studies consider the absence of auxiliary *do* as an important characteristic of Shakespeare's language which makes it different from the English used and taught in the present time. The main difference between the two studies is that the present study focused on the effect of *do* absence on EFL Libyan students' ability to understand questions and negative sentences written by Shakespeare.

In another study, Mohamed (2014) aimed to explore the use of translation as a method of evaluating second language knowledge by EFL teachers. It aimed to find out if translation is widely used and why and how it was used and if

English teachers agree or disagree with views of using translation in foreign language teaching and learning. The findings of the study support the widespread use of translation as a technique to assess students' comprehension, aid in the clarification of linguistic units, broaden students' vocabulary, cultivate their capacity for contrastive analysis, and evaluate their overall language acquisition.

The present study is similar to Mohamed's study in that both of them focus on the importance of using translation as a means to check students' ability to analyze and understand a foreign/second language. On the other hand, they differ in that the present study concerns only with using translation as a tool to assess students' ability to understand texts with syntactic differences because of belonging to different English periods.

Research Design:

This research is conducted in the Department of English, Faculty of Arts at Misurata University. In order to collect data, 33 participants were chosen from the students enrolled in the last year of the English department, during the academic year 2022-2033. All the participants were chosen from the last year because they passed all literature and translation courses. The method used in this study is mixed consisting of both quantitative (numerical) and qualitative (textual).

The instrument that was used to collect data was a simple translation test (Appendix A) in which students were asked to translate 3 negative interrogatives, 5 affirmative interrogatives, 5 negative statements, and 7 affirmative statements from English into Arabic (their native language). The affirmative sentences were only included in the translation test to serve as dummy items and divert students' attention away from the true objective of the study. All these statements were extracted from Shakespeare's plays (*All's well that ends well*, *Othello*, *The History of Troilus and Cressida*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *The Tragedy of King Richard III* & *The merry wives of Windsor*).

Results and Discussion:

This section presents and discusses the results of the current study. The results will be revealed according to the research questions posed earlier in this study.

Affirmative Questions:

Table (1) demonstrates the statistical analysis of the students' ability to understand the affirmative questions quoted from Shakespeare which aims to answer the first research question of the current study.

As seen in Table 1 below, the majority of participants' responses (73.33%) show that they were able to recognize that the statement is a question in spite of

the absence of the auxiliary verb to *do*. While, 9.09% of these responses indicate the students' failure to identify that, and some of them mistook the question words for relative pronouns. This was clear in this quoted question " *I will now hear, **what say you** of this gentlewoman?*", the suggested reason behind this error could be the presence of the question word (what) in the middle of the statement and the absence of *do*. However, approximately a quarter of questions remained untranslated, maybe the lack of *do* which made the students unsure about the exact meaning of the written statements.

Table 1 *The Participants' Responses to Affirmative Questions*

Statement	True	False	Unanswered
I will now hear, what say you of this gentlewoman?	22 (66.67%)	10 (30.30%)	1 (3.03%)
how called you the man you speak of, madam?	27 (81.81%)	2 (6.06%)	4 (12.12%)
what say you?	29 (87.87%)	1 (3.03%)	3 (9.09%)
what mean you , madam? I have made no fault.	19 (57.57%)	1 (3.03%)	13 (39.39%)
How understand we that?	24 (72.72%)	1 (3.03%)	8 (24.24%)
Total	121 (73.33%)	15 (9.09%)	29 (17.57%)

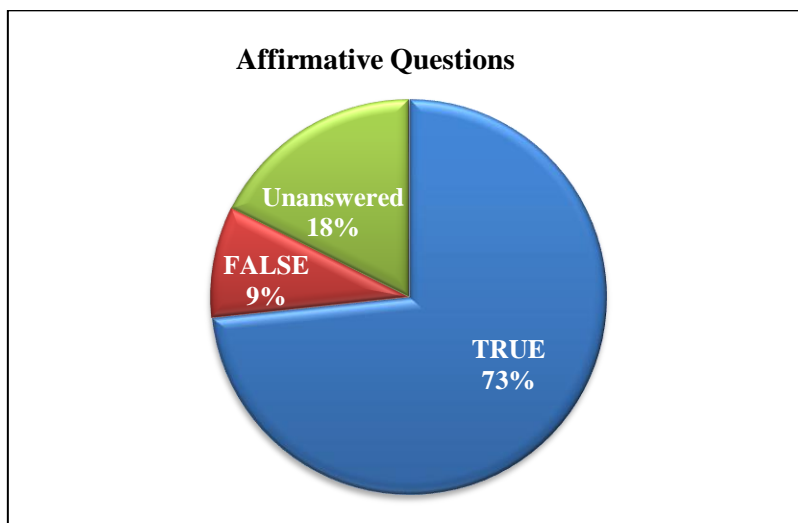


Chart 1 *The Participants' Responses to Affirmative Questions*

Negative Questions:Table 2 *The Participants' Responses to Negative Questions*

Statement	True	False		Unanswered
		Recognizing questions, but not negatives	Neither recognizing questions nor negatives	
And haue not we Affections?	12 (36.36%)	0 (0%)	9 (27.27%)	12 (36.36%)
Who knows not that the noble duke is dead?	15 (45.45%)	9 (27.27%)	1 (3.03%)	8 (24.24%)
Why went you not with Mr Doctor, maid?	22 (66.67%)	4 (12.12%)	0 (0%)	7 (21.21%)
Total	49 (49.49%)	13 (13.13%)	10 (10.10%)	27 (27.27%)
		23 (23.23%)		

The findings illustrated in Table 2 represent that in 49.49% of the responses, the students managed to figure out that the written statements were negative interrogatives. However, 23.23% of responses were wrong either because of the students' inability to discover the type of the statement (13.13%) or because they were able to point out that it was a question without noticing the negation (10.10%). It is worth mentioning that the statement "*And haue not we Affections?*" had the highest percentage of the wrong responses (27.27%) compared to the other two statements. The reason could be that yes/no questions are harder to be recognized due to the absence of both the question words and *do* support. Additionally, the number of questions that were kept untranslated increased by about 10% compared to the ones of the affirmative questions.

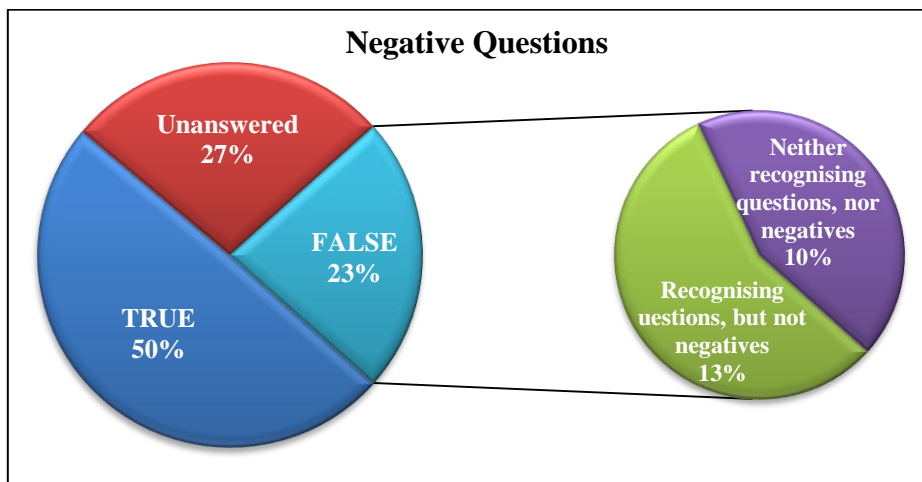


Chart 2 The Participants' Responses to Negative Questions

Negative Sentences:

Table 3 The Participants' Responses to Negative Sentences

Statement	True	False	Unanswered
And looks not on his evils: is not this true?	24 (72.72%)	5 (15.15%)	4 (12.12%)
Hold thee, there's my purse: I give thee not this to suggest thee from thy master thou talkest of; serve him still	11 (33.33%)	1 (3.03%)	21 (63.63%)
I see them not with my old eyes what are they?	24 (72.72%)	5 (15.15%)	4 (12.12%)
I know not , Menas, How lesser enmities may give way to greater.	19 (57.57%)	1 (3.03%)	13 (39.39%)
I heard not it before	26 (78.78%)	1 (3.03%)	6 (18.18%)
Total	104 (63.03%)	13 (7.88%)	48 (29.09%)

As listed above in Table 3 above, 63.03% of the responses revealed that students were able to discover the negation in the written sentences. While there were only 7.88% responses in which students fail to figure that out. The percentage of this error in this statement category is the least if it is compared with the two other categories above (affirmative and negative questions). This can be because of the appearance of *not* which enabled the participants to know

that these are negative structures regardless of the absence of *do*. At the same time, the unanswered responses in this category (29.09%) were the highest compared with other categories.

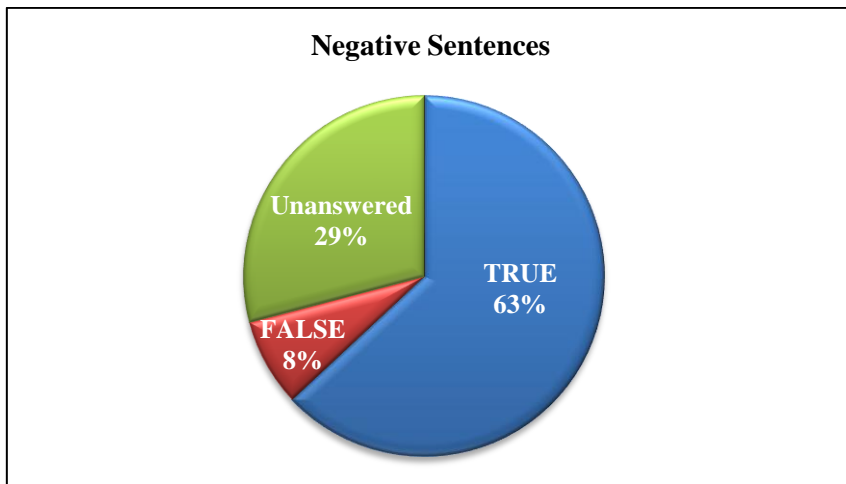


Chart 3 *The Participants' Responses to Negative Sentences*

Common Errors in Students' Responses:

The process of error analysis revealed some translation errors that students made frequently. In this section, those errors will be discussed briefly touching on some of the potential possible causes.

For example, in the question " *And haue not we Affections?* " 12 students out of 33 left it untranslated, and even the twelve students who succeeded in identifying it as a negative question had difficulty in recognizing the meaning of the verb (haue). Actually, Shakespeare's spelling is not this of Present-day English. Some of the spelling variations are completely regular, like the use of the letter "v" word initially for both the letter *u* (vpon) and the letter *v*, as well as the letter "u" when it appears inside a word (haue, loues) (Nevalainen, 2006). The existence of such differences was confusing for students.

Moreover, in the negative sentence " *Hold thee, there's my purse: I give thee not this to suggest thee from thy master thou talkest of; serve him still* " about 64% of the students left it blank without translation. This sentence contains the following Early Modern English pronouns such as *thee*, *thy*, and *thou* which were replaced in Modern English by the second-person object pronoun **you**, the second-person possessive adjective pronoun **your**, and the second-person subject pronoun **you**, respectively. Thus, when students are not aware of the meaning of these pronouns, they may face a problem in translating the

sentences that contain them. In this case, the ambiguity of the sentence was not only because of syntactic reasons, but its semantic complexity was also a factor in this case.

Table 4 *Early Modern English Personal and Possessive Pronouns*
(Görlach, 1991)

I (ich)	Thou	he	She	It	we	ye	they
Me	Thee	him	Her	It	us	you	them (hem)
my/mine	thy/thine	his	Her	His	our	your	Their

Furthermore, even though the participants were in their final semesters, it was noticed that many of them misidentified the tense of the statements, and their translations had tenses that differed from those in the statements. It is likely that the absence of the *do* support here also contributed to this.

Conclusion:

The current study aimed at investigating the ability of the Libyan EFL students at Misurata University to understand Early Modern English language, despite of the syntactic differences between that period and Modern English, basically the absence of *do* support. Regarding their translation performance, some of the students failed to notice the negations and questions, and others chose not to translate some of the statements. Besides, some of them faced difficulties in understanding some outdated pronouns, words, and the used tense. Although our expectations were that the students will not be able to identify the category of the sentences which were formed without the auxiliary *do*, most of the responses reveal that the students have sufficient ability to comprehend the different syntactic structures of Early Modern English.

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Appendix (A)
Translation Test

College:.....
Department.....
Name:.....(optional)
Semester.....

Thank you for agreeing to help us in this study. Your identity and your answers are completely anonymous and cannot be linked to you in any way that can identify you.
The following sentences and questions are taken from **Shakespeare's plays**, please try to **translate** them into **Arabic** in the provided area without using google translate.

I will now hear, what say you of this gentlewoman?

Madam, I desire your holy wishes

And looks not on his evils: is not this true?

Hold thee, there's my purse: I give thee not this to suggest thee from thy master thou talkest of; serve him still.

How called you the man you speak of, madam?

You are too young, too happy, and too good, to make yourself a son out of my blood.

Using Translation as a Tool to Explore Libyan EEL Students' Understanding...

I see them not with my old eyes what are they?

I know not, Menas, how lesser enmities may give way to greater.

what say you?

Come, sir, come;
I'll wrestle with you in my strength of love:
Look, here I have you; thus I let you go,
And give you to the gods

And haue not we Affections?

Were't not that we stand up against them all.

What mean you, madam? I have made no fault.

I have eyes upon him, and his affairs come to me on the wind.

Who knows not that the noble duke is dead?

I heard not it before

How understand we that?

Let us go see your son, I pray you: I long to talk with the young noble soldier.

Why went you not with Mr Doctor, maid?

Good my lord, to come thus was I not constrain'd, but did on my free will.
