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Teaching Arabic-English legal translation using model texts: a mixed-method study

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Legal translation is usually a challenging task for many students due to the unique features of legal discourse. Despite this, few studies have experimented training techniques aimed at helping students overcome legal translation difficulties. In this study, 37 Saudi university students received training for eight academic weeks in Arabic-English legal translation using model translated texts. Each translation activity in the training consisted of the following four stages: translating the Arabic legal text into English, comparing the translated text to its translated model, revising the translated text in light of the model, and noticing textual features of the target legal text type in more translated models. The pre- and post-tests showed that the training significantly improved the lexical, syntactic and punctuation aspects in the students' translated texts. The qualitative data also confirmed these positive gains. The results emphasize the importance of raising students' awareness of legal translation conventions and terminology, and the need for using relevant and graded learning materials in legal translator training.

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Introduction

Legal English is the language of law in English-speaking countries, and it has its unique stylistic features and linguistic peculiarities. Due to this, translating legal texts is a complex process and challenging task which needs specific skills and knowledge (Cao 2014). Šarčević's (1997), for instance, states that the legal translator should possess some basic knowledge and skill aspects such as knowledge of legal terms and the ability to analyze legal texts. Legal translation is more challenging for students as they normally have little familiarity with legal discourse and terminology in the target language (Way 2016). Given this, it is important to help students develop their legal translation awareness and ability.

In this study, we attempted to develop Saudi university students' legal translation ability through using model texts related to the tasks they perform. Legal translation teaching has generally received little research attention. It can be easily noted that published research on legal interpreting training and practices far much exceeds its legal translation counterpart (see for example, Abdel Latif 2020). Overall, there is a paucity of studies experimenting legal translation training techniques. In an attempt to address this gap, the study reported in this paper investigated the impact of using model texts in teaching Arabic-English legal translation on developing trainees' performance.

Model texts are high quality texts written by experts and include the characteristics and layout of the target genre (Martínez Esteban and Roca de Larios, 2010). Using model texts in legal translator training draws mainly upon the genre approach commonly used in second language writing instruction (e.g., Abdel Latif et al. 2024; Hyland 2004). The aim of such use is to familiarize students with the features of good texts in the target genre, and to get them to model these features in their own texts. Since legal discourse includes various genres (Albi 2013), some tenets of the genre approach can also guide legal translation teaching. Thus, we can integrate the use of model texts into translation teaching by adapting pedagogical procedures used in previous relevant writing studies (Abdel Latif et al. 2024; Luquin and Mayo 2021; Martínez Esteban and Roca de Larios 2010). Legal translators need to be aware of the legal genre conventions, characteristics and patterns (Albi et al. 2014).

Literature review

The written legal language in both English and Arabic. As a discourse type, legal English has its unique characteristics. These aspects vary slightly from oral to written legal English. With regard to the latter, Williams (2004) points out that written legal English—also called *legalese*—is characterized by having the following linguistic features: a) the frequency of archaic or rarely used nouns, adverbial words and multiword expressions; b) the use of many Latin and French words and phrases, and terms of Norman origin; c) the frequent repetition of particular lexical items, syntactic structures, and multiword prepositional structures for the sake of avoiding ambiguity in legal documents; d) the use of long, complex sentences characterized by using punctuation sparingly; e) the frequent use of passive structures; and f) the high frequency of impersonal language style such as using the third person to emphasize impartiality and authoritativeness.

In addition to these features, Stanojević (2011) also refers to the dominance of doublets and triplets—synonym pairs and strings referring to the same legal term or action—and to nominalization—changing simple verbs into nouns—in legal English texts. These features are mainly used for attaining effective phrasing and clarity in legal documents (Veretina-Chiriac 2012). Besides, legal English documents frequently contain legal terms or jargon;

and they also include common words with meanings specific only to legal settings (Rylance 1994).

Accordingly, English legal texts have their own linguistic obscurity and density. On the one hand, these uncommon linguistic features make it difficult to translate legal texts without having relevant background knowledge (Veretina-Chiriac 2012). On the other hand, the linguistic features of legal texts are more stable than those of other text types; this could facilitate the process of learning legal translation (Galán-Mañas 2013). Therefore, we could capitalize on these unique features of written legal English to help trainees develop their legal translation abilities.

Legal English translation difficulty is also associated with the differences between written legal English features and those of translators' native language. In Arabic—which is the native language of the present study participants, written legal texts have their unique characteristics as well. El-Farahaty (2015), for instance, states that in written legal Arabic, there are highly formal expressions and figurative language (such as using the first person plural, and honorific titles), and dominance of the masculine reference. Syntactically, legal Arabic is characterized by some features such as nominalization, doublets and triplets, complex sentences, and the dominance of the active voice. Besides, its punctuation has a case of ungrammaticality and does not follow well-defined rules, for detailed information see El-Farahaty (2015). The wide linguistic differences between legal language features in both English and Arabic indicate that Arabic-English legal translation is particularly a difficult task.

Empirical studies. Previous works on legal translator training have generally been either descriptive or prescriptive. The former type is concerned with investigating legal translation errors or training practices. The latter type relates to suggesting and exemplifying pedagogical translation training models or frameworks rather than experimenting them. A few descriptive studies have been concerned with investigating legal translation training and learning practices. Martínez Carrasco (2017), for instance, explored legal translator training in Spain through observing legal translation classes and profiling teachers' and students' practices. Sycz-Opoń (2019) also collected observational and think-aloud data to examine the information-seeking behaviors of trainees in their English-Polish legal translation, i.e., the information the trainees looked for, the sources they consulted frequently, and the difficulties they encountered during their information search.

Some previous descriptive research has addressed legal translation difficulties and/or their potential causes. For example, Hu and Cheng (2016) found that English-Chinese legal translation is hindered by problems such as the lack of reliable references and resourcing tools, inadequate legal knowledge, poor levels in the target language or source language, and the unique characteristics of legal register. Phelan's (2017) study also revealed that English-Spanish legal translation errors may be caused by some factors such as "mistranslation, misunderstanding of the source text, additions, omissions, word choice, register, faithfulness, literalness, false friends, cohesion, ambiguity, style and an open category entitled other" (204). In a more recent study, Atabekova (2023) analyzed the errors in selected chapter titles and article headings of a set of legal documents and publications translated from Russian into English. The results of this study showed that translated texts analyzed include a large number of grammar errors (17%), vocabulary errors (14%), and graphic ones (7%).

Some other studies have particularly focused on Arabic-English-Arabic translation challenges and error analysis. An early study was reported by Farghal and Shunnaq (1992) who

examined the legal translation errors made by Arab university graduate students. They identified three main problems in their participant students' legal translation: syntactic problems, lexical ones, and poor layout or punctuation. Similar results were also found by Alrishan (2019). Alshehab and Rababah (2020) also studied Arab university students' lexical legal translation. They classified the students' errors into the following categories: polysemies and homonymies, couplings, and legal adverbs. On the other hand, El-Farahaty (2016) analyzed the common difficulties of Arabic-English legal translation, and concludes that translating legal terms from Arabic into English requires professional training, robust linguistic knowledge, and legal awareness.

The large part of legal translator education literature relates to proposing legal translation training or pedagogical models. Some of these prescriptive works have highlighted the usefulness of corpus-based legal translation training (e.g., Albi 2013; Biel 2017; Giczela-Pastwa 2021; Monzó Nebot 2008; Prieto Ramos 2021). Biel (2017), for instance, proposed two complementary corpus-based models of legal translator training. In the first model corpora are used as a resource during the translation process to raise trainees' awareness of target legal conventions and terminology. In the second model, professional translation corpora are used to develop trainees' critical thinking and strategic ability. According to Monzó Nebot (2008), corpus-based legal translator training "is particularly helpful for trainees to identify the textual manifestations of these effects and to decide how they should be transferred across languages and legal systems" (p. 221). Prieto Ramos (2021) also views that using corpus-based pedagogy in legal translator training can result in positive gains due to the salience of terminology and phraseology as key features in legal discourse.

Some other pedagogical techniques have been proposed for training legal translators. For example, Gómez González-Jover (2011) discussed the pedagogical elements to be integrated into university legal translation courses. The pedagogical elements Gómez González-Jover referred to include: legal background knowledge, relevant legal vocabulary, authentic and representative legal materials, and appropriate material grading and presentation. Meanwhile, Prieto Ramos (2011) suggested an integrative legal translation competence model which assumes that developing legal translator skills requires interdisciplinary methods for practical problem-solving. Likewise, Galán-Mañas (2013) described a contrastive rhetoric model of legal translator training. The model is based on the assumptions that translation is a cross-text process, and that each genre has its own stable structural characteristics and linguistic conventions. Galán-Mañas's model makes use of the task-based approach with which translation tasks are graded in terms of their difficulty.

Two main conclusions can be easily drawn from the above review of related works. First, legal trainee translators encounter many challenges causing them to make different types of errors in their translation tasks. Second, there seems to have been few studies experimenting legal translation training techniques. As noted, the above-mentioned training models are basically prescriptive ones which have not been experimented. Therefore, there is a need for experimenting legal translation training to make sure it could help students overcome their legal translation problems. In light of the above, this study will try to answer the following two research questions:

1. To what extent does using model translated texts influence Saudi students' Arabic-English performance in translating different legal text types (short legal documents– i.e., certificates, receipts, notifications and powers of attorney– versus legal contracts)?

2. What are the students' perceptions of teaching legal translation using model texts?

Through answering these two research questions, the study could have important implications to teaching legal translation. Specifically, it could provide insights into how to use model texts effectively in training legal translators.

Methodology of the study. To answer the above two research questions, the study drew upon a mix-method research design through using translation pre- and post-tests and a questionnaire. By combining quantitative and qualitative data, the study aimed at providing strong evidence about the experimentation of using model texts in training legal translators.

Participants. Thirty-seven undergraduate English majors studying at a Saudi university took part in the study. These were in their third year of university study. All the participants were Saudi male students; due to some institutional constraints we were able to conduct the experimental treatment only with male students; in the very vast majority of Saudi universities female and males study in different sub-campus of the same university. The 37 students were enrolled in an advanced translation course, and they were distributed in two classes (20 students in one class, and 17 in the other one). During the data collection stage, the students were attending an undergraduate English language education programme in which they study a number of translation and interpreting courses. All the students agreed to participate in the study voluntarily, and informed consent was obtained from them.

The pedagogical treatment. The pedagogical treatment focused only on Arabic-English legal translation which is generally viewed as more complicated and difficult than its English-Arabic counterpart (El-Farahaty 2015, 2016). As implied above, the present study adapted the pedagogical procedures used in some two previous writing studies (Abdel Latif et al. 2024; Luquin and Mayo 2021; Martínez Esteban and Roca de Larios 2010). Such adaptation was made taking into account the different nature of translator training. The pedagogical procedures or stages used in these two writing studies are: text writing, text comparison and text revision. Adapting these steps in the present study, we used the following four stages in each pedagogical scenario:

- Text translation: getting students to collaboratively translate the text (in groups of 3–4 students);
- Translated text comparison: getting students to compare their translated texts to the model one.
- Text revision: getting students to collaboratively revise their translated texts in light of the model one.
- Discussion: getting students to collaboratively notice and discuss the linguistic and punctuation features in two more similar model translated texts.

Unlike the three-stage use of models in previous writing research, the fourth stage or activity was added to each scenario as a reinforcement component to enhance students' knowledge of legal English terms and textual features. Likewise, the training includes no text generation activities due to the differences between writing and translation tasks. The role of the faculty member teaching the course (the first author) in these classroom activities was to guide students' legal translation learning by orchestrating and managing activity implementation, stimulating students' noticing and discussion, drawing their attention to the key linguistic and punctuation features in texts and to the differences between written legal Arabic and English features, checking students' understanding and knowledge and providing

needed feedback, evaluating their activity-based learning progress, and providing support to students when needed.

The corpus of the model legal translated texts used in this training was selected from two Arabic-English legal translation references (Al-Morshedy 2007; Hatem et al. 1995). The texts chosen represent the legal text types addressed in the study: a) short or one-page legal documents: certificates, receipts, notifications and powers of attorney; and b) contracts which are regarded as long legal texts. The authors worked collaboratively in grading the legal texts selected in terms of their difficulty, from the least to the more difficult. Of the set of model texts selected, the authors also identified the ones which would be used in student practice activities, and noticing ones, and in the pre- and post-tests.

Pre- and post-assessments. The study depended on the pre-post testing of the students' Arabic-English legal translation. The pre- and post-tests include two translation sections: a section with short legal texts– certificates and powers of attorney in both tests–, and another section with a part from a contract. The texts were different in the two tests to avoid the influence of students' text familiarity on their post-test performance. The texts used in the two tests were almost of the same number of lines. Each test was allotted an hour and a half to complete. As indicated above, the texts included in the two tests were chosen from the above two legal translation sources (i.e., Al-Morshedy 2007; Hatem et al. 1995).

To understand the students' perceptions of the pedagogical treatment, we also used a student evaluation questionnaire which included seven open-ended questions. These questions ask students about their evaluation of the legal translation training they received in the course, the way they felt their legal translation performance has improved during the course, the perceived merits and demerits of the course, the legal text types they found more or less difficult, their perceived legal translation difficulties they still need to overcome, and their potential suggestions for improving the course. The questions were written in Arabic, and the students were also asked to complete the questionnaire in Arabic so as to facilitate communicating their ideas.

Procedures and data analysis. The procedures of the study started with administering the pre-test. The students completed the test in the academic week preceding the beginning of the training. The pedagogical treatment lasted for eight weeks during the translation course. There were three teaching hours in each week; i.e., the treatment was implemented in 24 h over the eight weeks. The first author implemented the pedagogical treatment as described above (subsection "The pedagogical treatment"). In the

week following the end of the pedagogical treatment, the students completed the post-test and the evaluation questionnaire. In the pre- and post-tests, the students were allowed to use printed general dictionaries.

The data collected was analyzed in two stages. The first stage involved analyzing the students' performance on the pre- and post-tests. We analyzed the students' translated legal texts in the two tests using a 100-point rubric for evaluating three language areas: lexical aspects or the correct use of legal terms and words in the target text (40), syntactic aspects or the correct use of grammar in it (40), and the correct use of punctuation marks (20). The focus on these three language areas in the data analysis is consistent with the approaches used in previous studies (e.g., Atabekova 2023; Farghal and Shunnaq 1992). Rating the students' translated texts in both tests in terms of the three areas depended basically on the number of errors they made. We independently rated the students' translated texts in both tests, and then the average scores for the two ratings in both the pre- and post-testing conditions were calculated and compared. The data was descriptively and inferentially analyzed. In addition, we counted the raw and percentages of the errors the students made in the three language areas. In the second stage of the data analysis, we analyzed the students' responses to the questionnaire. First, we sorted out the students' answers to the questionnaire open-ended questions, and we translated these answers into English. Then, we independently read the students' answers to, and then met online to discuss the relevant themes each one identified in the questionnaire data. Based on our discussion, the final qualitative data categories were refined.

Results of the data analysis

In what follows, the results of the data analysis are presented in light of the two research questions the study addressed. The first part provides the results of the quantitative data, whereas the second part relates to the qualitative data.

The students' legal translation performance. As indicated above, we assessed the potential differences between the students' legal translation performance before and after the training received by calculating the raw numbers and percentages of the lexical, syntactic and punctuation errors in their answers to the pre- and post-tests, and also by comparing their mean scores on the two tests. Table 1 shows examples of the lexical, syntactic and punctuation errors made by the students in their Arabic-English legal translation. From the three examples given for each English translation error type, it may be inferred that lexical errors represent the most complicated error type in legal translation.

Table 1 Examples of the lexical, syntactic and punctuation errors made by the students in their Arabic-English legal translation.			
Error type	Arabic text part	English translation error example	Correction of the English translation error
Lexical errors	أقر أنا الموقع أدناه....	I <u>the one signing below</u>	I, the undersigned, hereby declare...
	... بأن يقوم نيابة عنيto <u>do instead of me through</u>	...to act on my behalf in accordance with this power
	بموجب هذه الوكالة....	<u>using this document</u> ...	of attorney ...
	يتعهد الطرف المتعاقد بتأدية واجباته الوظيفية على أكمل وجه يستطيعه...	The <u>signed part confirms to do his job perfectly</u> ...	The Contracted Party shall undertake to carry out his job duties to the best of his abilities...
Syntactic errors	... اتمت التعاقد مع يسرى هذا العقد لمدة عام has entered into <u>contract</u> with This contract <u>will</u> be valid for one year...	... has entered into a contract with This contract shall be valid for one year...
Punctuation errors	تحريرا فى... بإذاعة الرياض	Dated <u>in</u> ...	Dated on ...
	وافق الطرف الثانى على....	... in Riyadh <u>radio</u> in Riyadh Radio...
	تكلفه بها الوزارة....	The <u>second party</u> has agreed to ... assigned to him by the <u>ministry</u> .	The Second Party has agreed to ... assigned to him by the Ministry.

Table 2 The raw numbers and percentages of the students' lexical, syntactic and punctuation errors on the pre- and post-tests.

Error type	Test	Short legal documents	Contracts	Total number of errors	Percentage
Lexical errors	Pre-test	267	224	491	46.58%
	Post-test	101	66	167	34.36%
Syntactic errors	Pre-test	226	149	375	35.57%
	Post-test	126	98	224	46.09%
Punctuation errors	Pre-test	113	75	188	17.83%
	Post-test	64	31	95	19.54%
Total errors	Pre-test	606	448	1054	100%
	Post-test	291	195	486	100%

This can be attributed to the use of archaic nouns and multiword expressions in legal English (Williams 2004).

The descriptive analyses of the students' error types support the above explanation of the nature of lexical errors in legal translation. Table 2, which gives the raw numbers and percentages of the lexical, syntactic and punctuation errors on the pre- and post-tests, shows that the students' lexical errors constitute the largest proportion of any error type on the pre-test (percentage = 46.58%). As noted, the students' errors have significantly decreased in all the three textual features on the post-test as compared to their errors on the pre-test (total number of errors = 1054 and 486 in the pre- and post-tests, respectively).

It is clear that the pedagogical treatment has helped in minimizing the students' lexical errors ($N = 491$ and 167 in the pre- and post-tests, respectively) than their syntactic errors ($N = 375$ and 224 in the pre- and post-tests, respectively) and punctuation ones ($N = 188$ and 95 in the pre- and post-tests, respectively). It can be also noted that the decrease in the students' legal translation errors on the post-test varied from one error type to another; the highest decrease was in the students' lexical errors and the lowest decrease was in their punctuation errors. This has resulted in changing the percentages of these error types on the post-test as compared to the pre-test (lexical errors = 46.58% and 34.36%; syntactic errors = 35.57% and 46.09%; punctuation errors = 17.83% and 19.54% on the pre- and post-tests, respectively). Overall, these statistics mean that all the students' legal translation error types decreased on the post-test, but the students' higher success in avoiding lexical errors has minimized their percentages on the post-test as compared to the proportions of syntactic and punctuation errors.

The differences in the percentage distributions in the three error types have very likely resulted from the training received. The students' noticing of the lexical features in the model texts they were exposed to have particularly helped them be aware of the appropriate legal terms and expressions to use when translating each legal genre. Meanwhile, they made more errors in translating the contract part in the two tests as compared to the two short legal texts which include the same number of lines as the contract (total errors in the translated short legal documents = 606 and 291; total errors in the translated contracts = 448 and 195 in the pre- and post-tests, respectively). This means that the students had more difficulties in translating contracts in both tests.

The noted differences in the students' errors on both tests are further confirmed by the scores given to their translated texts in the two conditions. Table 3 gives the students' scores on the pre- and post- legal translation tests. The Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test was used to examine the significance of the differences between the students' mean scores on the two tests. As noted, the students' lexical, syntactic and punctuation scores on the pre-test with its two parts significantly differ from their scores on the post-test. The differences in all the three textual aspects are significant at the 0.000 level. It can be also noted that the students' contract

translation scores are slightly lower than the short legal document ones. Overall, the data given in the two tables clearly indicate that teaching legal translation to the students using models has helped them avoid their errors and in turn improve their translated text quality. Despite this, the short time of the training has perhaps caused some of these students to retain some of their legal translation errors (post-test mean scores = 80.02 and 77.46 out of 100 each in translating the short legal documents and contracts, respectively). This means that the students should have been exposed to more legal translation models and also practiced translating legal texts for a longer time.

The students' perceptions of the legal translation training received.

The students' answers to the open-ended questionnaire completed after the end of the course have also added to our evaluation of the legal translation training they received. With regard to the first and third questions which concern the students' perceptions of the teaching method used in the course (*In general, how have you found learning Arabic-English legal translation in this course? In your opinion, are there any merits in learning legal translation in the way taught to you in this course?*), the students' answers to these two questions revealed their positive gains from the legal translation training received. They generally agreed that the use of models has helped them become aware of the legal translation features, and enabled them to understand appropriate legal terms and expressions in particular. The students also reported that this kind of translation training was novel to them, and that through models they have become aware of the unique features and conventions of legal English. Some of them also said they had difficulties in legal translation at the beginning of the training but the models used have gradually helped them be familiar with its characteristics.

The students' answers to the second question (*Do you feel your Arabic-English legal translation performance has improved a lot during the course?*) also provided further details about their perceived gains from the use of model texts in teaching legal translation. Thanks to this consciousness-raising dimension, most students found themselves aware gradually of legal translation tactics and jargon, and also well-prepared for their future workplaces which will require translating similar legal texts. The following four answers summarize the way this teaching technique has changed the students' legal translation awareness and perceptions:

- Legal translation was very difficult at the beginning of the course as this was the first time learning it. But I found the models useful and of good variety, and they gave me an idea about how to translate legal texts.
- The models were very excellent indeed. They showed me the common terms and the legal expressions I was completely unfamiliar with. These models will of course help me in the future when I become a translator.
- Yes, I like this teaching method because using models can help

Table 3 The students' scores on the pre- and post- legal translation tests.							
Legal text type	Textual features	Pre-test scores		Post-test scores		Z	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Short legal documents	Lexical features (40)	16.10	1.11	32.81	1.72	−5.339	0.000
	Syntactic features (40)	18.90	1.05	29.70	0.87	−5.347	0.000
	Punctuation (20)	12.35	1.27	17.51	1.07	−5.254	0.000
	Total score (100)	47.35	2.62	80.02	3.30	−5.389	0.000
Contracts	Lexical features (40)	15.91	1.08	31.27	1.16	−5.329	0.000
	Syntactic features (40)	17.84	1.21	28.40	1.09	−5.331	0.000
	Punctuation (20)	12.82	1.18	17.79	1.14	−5.254	0.000
	Total score (100)	46.57	2.44	77.46	3.79	−5.365	0.000

us be more professional in legal translation which is different from other translation types. I think most of my translation work in the future will be in legal texts; so I have to improve my skills in it.

- This is a very good method of teaching legal translation. We didn't know to translate these legal texts before, but in this course we have learned how to do it correctly and how to easily notice our translation errors and fix them.

The fifth questionnaire question is about the difficulty of the legal text types they translated (*Which text types have you found more difficult to translate (certificates, notifications, powers of attorney, or contracts)?*). The students' answers to this question are consistent with their scores on the pre- and post-tests. Most students congruently said that they found more difficulties in translating contracts than in translating short legal documents. The main reason mentioned in some of their answers is the large number of unknown legal terms and expressions they encounter in translating contracts in comparison to short legal documents which do not include a large number of unfamiliar vocabularies. With this wider range of unknown legal terms and expressions, the students found it difficult to find the target lexical items they searched for in the available resources:

- Translating notifications and receipts are somewhat easier than other text types.
- It was easy to find English words and phrases when translating certificates and notifications, but as for contracts I didn't find some terms.
- Translating contracts was much more difficult due to the confusion in vocabulary. It needs more concentration.

As noted in the above answers, the students' main concern in legal translation is finding the target legal vocabulary.

In their answers to the question about whether or not they still have legal translation difficulties (*After studying legal translation in this course, do you still have difficulties you need to overcome in it?*), nine students replied negatively. The other 28 students said that they were still in a need for a better legal translation performance. Collectively, while acknowledging the performance improvement they have made in legal translation during the course, these students reported they still need to know more legal English discourse features, and to have more practice and experience in this translation type. These needs can be noted in the following sample answers:

- Now I know correct legal terms and know how to translate legal texts. But I still need more experience to know more about the language used in legal translation. The English legal terms are various and difficult.
- There are of course some problems I need to overcome. I have never been trained in this translation type and the main problem in legal translation is that its texts are full of terms not commonly used in general English.

- I need to read and review a large number of English legal texts to know more terms and expressions and where to use them.
- I have to practice legal translation with all its types in order to acquire the largest number of legal terms and become experienced in translating legal texts.

Finally, questions 4 and 7 in the questionnaire concern the students' views on the weaknesses of the legal translation training they received and their potential suggestions for improving it (*In your opinion, are there any demerits in learning legal translation in the way taught to you in this course? Do you have any suggestions for improving the way legal translation was taught to you in this course? If so, please explain*). Most students answered the two questions negatively; in other words, they neither referred to any weaknesses in the training received nor gave any suggestions for improving it. This means they were generally happy with the legal translation training they had. The few students with positive responses talked about the need for longer training time and more legal translation training courses, and for making related lexical sources available in their training, along with lists of commonly used terms and expressions in the target legal text types. For example:

- I still have some problems in legal translation. So, the Department should provide us with more than one legal translation course.
- It will be better if we have access to different legal translation resources and lists of terms in the course. This will make the learning process easier.

Overall, the above qualitative data goes in line with the quantitative data in confirming the students' gains in learning legal translation through models, and showing that there remain some shortcomings to overcome.

Discussion

The above results indicate that the use of translated models in Arabic-English legal translation training has enhanced the trainees' awareness of correct legal English terms and expressions, and enabled them to avoid their translation errors. In turn, these students were able to produce translated legal texts with better lexical, syntactic and punctuation aspects. Moreover, the students' reported perceptions of the training showed that they value the pedagogical technique used because what matters most for them in legal translation is their knowledge and use of the target lexical items. This is perhaps the reason why they made a better improvement in the lexical features of the translated texts as compared to the syntactic and punctuation ones.

The improvement in the syntactic and punctuation aspects in the students' translations can be attributed to their noticing– with the teacher's guidance– of these aspects in the multiple models they read. The distributions of the students' legal translation error types in the post-test generally concur with some previous research findings (e.g., Atabekova 2023; Farghal and Shunnaq

1992). It is noteworthy, however, that the experimentation time in the present study was rather short due to the few academic weeks available for teaching the translation course. This has negatively influenced the time allocated to teaching the translation of each legal genre. Thus, the 8-week training has helped the students to avoid making a large number but not all of their legal translation errors. In other words, the students could have developed more robust legal Arabic-English translation knowledge and better performance levels if they have been trained for a longer time.

Overall, the results of the present study show that—like the case of writing instruction (e.g., Luquin and Mayo 2021; Martínez Esteban and Roca de Larios 2010)—the use of models can also yield positive gains in translator training. Additionally, these results emphasize the importance of consciousness-raising of legal translation conventions and terminology, a common purpose for corpora-based legal translation training prescribed in some works (e.g., Albi 2013; Biel 2017; Giczela-Pastwa 2021; Monzó Nebot 2008; Prieto Ramos 2021). Importantly, the results also indicate the need for considering some main pedagogical guidelines in legal translator training, including relevant legal vocabulary, representative learning materials, and appropriate material grading (Gómez González-Jover 2011).

Conclusion

Some conclusions can be drawn from the results of the present study. First, the study indicates that model texts represent an effective tool in English legal translation teaching. Since novice legal translators are normally unaware of legal English conventions and terminology, using model texts as a core teaching material in their training could help in familiarizing them with the linguistic and textual features of this genre. Second, for using model texts in legal translator training to be effective, some factors should be considered such as grading the materials depending on the difficulty of the legal texts taught, and allocating adequate time to the training. Finally, using model texts in legal translation training is expected to make a larger impact on reducing trainees' lexical errors in particular. The teacher can play an important role in drawing trainees' attention to syntactic and punctuation features in legal texts. Awareness-raising activities can help a lot in this regard.

The present study is not without its limitations. Since the experimentation of the proposed pedagogical technique lasted for eight weeks only, future studies could explore its potential impact on trainees' performance if experimented for a longer time. Due to sample accessibility constraints, the proposed pedagogical technique was only experimented with male trainees. Therefore, future research may investigate female trainees' responses to the use of models in legal translation training. It is also important to examine whether or not the use of model translated texts could enhance students' legal translation performance in other target languages.

Data availability

The data of this study is not publicly available to protect the participants' privacy and confidentiality. The data will be available upon request to the corresponding author on asbrashi@uqu.edu.sa.

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Author contributions

Abbas Brashi: conceptualization, investigation, data curation, data analysis, writing, review & editing, funding acquisition. Muhammad M. Abdel Latif: conceptualization, methodology, data curation, data analysis, writing, review & editing.

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

Ethical approval

This study was conducted in compliance with the Declaration of Helsinki and its ethical guidelines. The study was approved by the Arab Observatory for Translation (an affiliate of ALECSO) and its research ethics committee (no: 236/2023). The research procedures and instruments of the study were also approved by the research committee of Umm Al-Qura University's College of Social Sciences, which is the first author's workplace; ethical approval date: February 17, 2023.

Informed consent

Prior to conducting the study, all the participants were provided with clear information about its purpose, the voluntary nature of their research participation, the protection of their privacy and personal data, and the use of empirical data for research purposes only. Informed written consent with this information was obtained from all the participants who took part in the study.

Additional information

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