
  
**Difficulties in Translating Business Terms as an English for  
Specific Purposes Genre among First Year Master Students of English  
at Frères Mentouri Constantine 1 University, Algeria**  


**Dr Sekhri Ouided\***

**Date of Submission: 17/10/2022**

**Date of Acceptance: 14/04/2023**

**Abstract:** Business is a tool of paramount importance through which countries increase their economy and many other aspects all over the world. Since English is the dominant language used in this field, many cultures and nations meet together to do business. For that, translation is needed to transfer messages between languages among different countries. This study aims to cast some light on the difficulties that first-year Master's students of English (Linguistics and Applied Languages) face while translating business terms. It also seeks to test whether students tend to translate those terms literally and to investigate to what extent they are aware of using the different methods of translation in order to get an accurate equivalent in the target text. The data are gathered through the use of a written test with different technical terms that students are required to translate. The results show that the students are influenced by their first language (Arabic) which results in the use of literal translation as a method by most of them, and this influences the meaning of the source text.

**Keywords:** English for Specific Purposes, business terms, Master students, translation.

### **Introduction**

Translating any piece of writing depends mainly on finding equivalents in the target language for source language items. Because the English language is considered as number one in the world, it is used in many fields and business is no exception. For that, working in a business environment exposes one to new words that are covered in Standard English as a foreign language; it is requested to translate those words into the mother tongue or the first

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\*- Frères Mentouri Constantine 1 University

Email: widaddoudou92@yahoo.com (auteur correspondant)

language of some people who are not proficient in English. However, translating business English needs some skills in order not to fall into the trap of literal translation, which results in distorting the meaning of business terms. Students face many difficulties when translating specialised registers such as in the field of business; As a result, this research tries to reveal the main difficulties that they may face.

This research aims to highlight the different aspects that make the translation of terms in business difficult, and what makes that translation peculiar when compared with others. It attempts to determine to what extent meaning is preserved in the target language even if there is a change in the lexicon from one language to another. It tries to cast some light on the most important difficulties that students face in the translation of business terms.

### 1. Definition of Business English

Business English is the English needed when doing business that is to say the type of English used in the Business context such as international trade, commerce, finance, insurance, banking, and many office settings. Since English is an international language, using it in Business makes it interdisciplinary in this field.

It is in continuous improvement, especially when dealing with business contracts and the translation of business documents; these latter have been of great importance. Business should include language knowledge, communication skills, cultural awareness and other core content. English used in technology imports, foreign trade, foreign-related insurance, international transport, foreign labour service contracts and other business activities can be collectively referred to as Business English (Brieger, 1997).

It is also one of the branches of ESP:

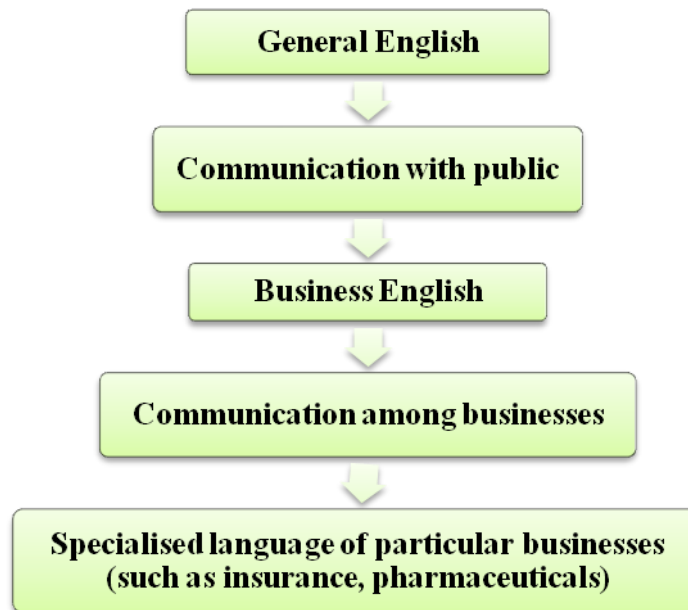
Business English must be seen in the overall of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) as it shares the important elements of needs analysis, syllabus design, course design, and material selection and development, which are common to all fields of work in ESP (Ellis and Johnson, 1994, p. 3).

Despite, Business English is estimated as different from other categories in ESP: "...it is often a mix of specific content (relating to particular job, area or industry), and general content (relating to general ability to communicate more effectively, albeit in different situations" (Ibid., p. 3).

Moreover, Pickett (1986) claims that business communication has different views: "...a lot nearer to everybody language spoken by the general public than many other segments of ESP". In order to clarify his point of view he has used a representation that shows two particular aspects of business communication which are portrayed in the following figure:

**Figure 1**

*Pickett Representation (Dudley – Evans & St John, 1998, p. 55)*



## 1. Translation of Business Terms

Since universal business is a reality and it is spreading all over the world, economic benefits of a universal economy cannot be achieved without challenges; in order to attain global economy, businesses should have their translations of business and legal documents into a number of target languages. These translations involve some critical elements that may not be found in many other translation categories (Robert Stitt, n.d.).

Goudec (2007, pp. 31-32) illustrates and classifies the translation of Business English into the following according to business activities:

1. Commercial Translation: it covers all types of commercial documentation such as invoices, contracts, transport documentation, customs documents...etc.
2. Financial Translation: it encompasses any kind of financial documentation, or what is related to the area of finance, banking, taxes, stock exchange, and economic activity in general.
3. Marketing/ Advertising Translation: a kind of translation for use in marketing, or advertising companies, or drives.

Translation plays the role of instructor which makes it a survival strategy. When approaching source texts, translators are experts in being acquainted with strangers and texts from other cultures. In discussing their craft, they acknowledge the importance of being receptive to the possibilities of source languages, the languages they are translating from. (Biguenet and Schulte, 1989). In this respect, the German critic and literary historian August Wilhelm Schlegel (n.d) argues that the practice of translation should give critics the opportunity to develop a "flexibility which enables us, by renouncing personal predilection and blind habit, to transfer ourselves into the peculiarities of other nations and ages, to feel them from their own centre." (Wellek, 1955, p. 38).

In the context of business translation, Baker and Saldanha (1997) claim that little attention has been paid to business translation because of the difficulty of classifying such translation activity. Moreover, as the business lexis is a specific and specialised one, the translators have to find the exact equivalent of the source word as it was in the original context. In spite of that, they encounter many problems; some of them as Stitt (2016) indicates:

### ○ Terminology

The language of business and law is different from the language spoken by most people on the street. Documents are full of specific terms, each with a clear and distinct meaning; a simple change in a word's context could have disastrous results. When these words are translated from language to language, it is of paramount importance to know the unique

legal language of the target country and jurisdiction in order not to distort the message. This becomes even more critical when dealing with patents and specialised fields.

### ○ **Metaphors**

How can something that has no cultural significance be translated? How would “a snowball’s chance in hell” be explained to somebody without an understanding of snow, a snowball, or the concept of hell? Ideas, boundaries, and time are not the same in all languages or cultures and this must be effectively accommodated.

### ○ **Culture**

Even small cultural elements can have major impacts. From embarrassment to outrage, a simple gaffe can sink a deal. Consider the Chinese word that sounds like “shi” in English. There are dozens of variants of that sound in China and some of them may be used offensively.

### ○ **Deadlines**

Most business documents are time sensitive, i.e., they have a deadline that should not be exceeded. Documents that miss deadlines are typically invalidated. One might have to start the process all over again if their work is not cut away entirely.

### ○ **Confidentiality**

The topics discussed in business and legal documents are confidential. Translators should ensure that their translation has been done carefully and critically, and their translation services suit their translators and have confidentiality agreements on file. The leaking or sale of information could be extremely detrimental to a business, patent, or marketing campaign.

### ○ **Legal System**

Each country has its own legal system, which is totally different from others. Even countries that speak the same colloquial language can have vastly different legal languages and practices. Just consider the vast differences in jurisprudence between the English-speaking countries of the United States, Canada, and England. It is imperative that the translator should be familiar with the most current legal court decisions and practices of the legal jurisdiction in which documents consist of.

## 2. Translation Characteristics and Process of Business English

Translation characteristics of business English are mainly professionalism, timeliness, uniqueness, and diversity. Concerning the first characteristic, which is professionalism, it is believed that business English is part of specialised English, which is composed of a number of fields. Some of these latter have special needs to be translated as the agreed rules in the industry in order to be better understood.

As an example, there is the shipping date, double check, B2B (Business to Business), C2B (Business to Business), and CBS (Business to Business). Moreover, translation specialists consider business English translation as very time-sensitive because of the rapid change in the international economic situation. In fact, the translation of business English does not resemble the translation of ordinary foreign language texts where more time for revision is available; it will lose its value after a very short time like a few days. In reality, some messages of emergency can be of no value in a few hours (Grabowski, 2022).

Information is changing quickly with the emergence of new technologies; this pushes translators to find professional terms for new products to give their meaning; in reality, this requires business English to translate them as aptly as possible in the process of translation to show the uniqueness of business English and provide a reference for subsequent translators. Last but not least, business English is a good example where many tenses and grammar are executed according to the English standard; however, these grammars need to be combined with the latest laws and regulations to make business English flexible in the process of translation to meet the understanding needs of readers and fully reflect its diversity (Su, 2021).

To clarify more the characteristics of business English it is highly required to have a look at the translator's role in the process of translating business English. Translators' role in business, economic, financial or management texts must be to work on levels. The task of translators on the first level is to try to translate new terms that appear in business, which is a dynamic and fundamental field of the world nowadays. Thus, they shall be acquainted with a highly specialized vocabulary. Indeed, this circumstance causes the emergence of concepts, which should be translated before it is used or fixed in dictionaries.

The best example is the difficulties that arise when a text discusses business practices of a country, which are unknown to the translators or not yet introduced in their society. Sometimes these terms are transliterated from English in quotation marks in specialized business texts because the translator has failed to find equivalents to them. Some terms are just coined, and after that may terms disappear before they are translated or fixed in dictionaries because of the dynamism of the field.

The second level suggests that the translator has to cope with a kind of language that consists of different forms of colloquial and literary discourse. Business English is characterised by having denotative and connotative levels of meaning as it includes many cultural and rhetorical sources, such as (implications, ironies, metaphors, etc.). Hence, the role of the translator is to be able to spot stylistic means that languages are full of, like double meanings, presuppositions, implicatures, idiomatic expressions, puns, and hidden relevant information. This makes the task of the translator difficult if not unsatisfactory (Mateo, 1993).

The difficulty of translating specialised English business registers stems from terms and expressions that are brand new. So if one tries to check them up in dictionaries of target languages a few years old, they may not be found. Apart from that, translating specialised English business registers is not difficult if the terms are fixed and used in a lasting business tradition. Examples are expressions like "bull market" or "bear market" which are commonly used in business; they refer to the rising and falling of the buying and selling in the Stock Market. Since these terms appear in most dictionaries of Business and Commerce, they should not make a problem for the translator (Ibid.).

### 3. Research Method

A test in the field of business translation has been used as a tool for the data collection. Students were asked to answer the test by translating some sentences that contain business words. Their answers are analysed in order to test the validity of the hypothesis. The test was given to the students by the end of the second semester in one of the sessions in the presence of their teacher and they have taken it as a timed test.

The population of this study are first Master's students specialised in Linguistics and Applied Language studies. The choice was based on some criteria mainly because of the fact that they are not beginners in translation as they have been studying it for almost three years. A sample of twenty-four students has been taken as a quarter ( $\frac{1}{4}$ ) of the whole population in the Department of English, Frères Mentouri Constantine 1 University.

After gathering the students' answers to the test, the process of the data analysis focuses on the students' translation of the terms rather than the sentences as a whole. This is done as this research mainly concentrates on the translation of specialised business terms rather than sentences. The sentences were given to the students to check if the context is going to be helpful in finding equivalents. The data are tabulated and analysed with the use of percentages.

#### 4. Analysis of the Results

The results of the test are presented after being gathered and tabulated. It is worth mentioning that all the students answered the test, but not all of them succeeded to translate all the terms and sentences provided to them in the test. The tables that follow summarise the outcome of the students' translation:

##### 1. Translation of the term 'target price'

Table 1

*Students' translation of the term 'target price'*

English terms	Students' translations	Number of responses	Percentage
Target Price	السعر المقنن	01	% 4,17
	ثمن المنتج	02	8,33 %
	الثمن المبتغى	02	8,33%
	سعر إستدلالي	01	4,17 %
	السعر الجديد	02	8,33%
	القيمة المستهدفة	02	8,33 %
	الثمن المطلوب	01	4,17 %
	السعر المحدد	02	8,33 %
	السعر المطلوب	01	4,17 %
	السعر الخارجي	05	20,29 %
	السعر/ الثمن المستهدف	03	13,04 %
	مكافأة	01	4,17 %
No answer	01	4,17 %	
Total	31	24	100 %



**Table 1** portrays that not all the students translated the term 'target price'; some of them tried to give a close translation to it. Twelve suggestions were given by the students. Among them: "السعر الجديد and سعر استدلالي, الثمن المبتغى, ثمن المنتج, السعر المطلوب, الثمن المطلوب" which were translated literally by nine students (37,5%). In addition, the translation "القيمة" "المستهدفة" was given by two students (8,33 %) which is not the exact translation of the term. However, it is acceptable. This indicates that students use literal translation as a method. In addition, only three students (13,04 %) succeeded in giving the right translation of the term "السعر/ الثمن المستهدف". For the remaining translations such as "مكافأة", they are unacceptable and wrong. This indicates that the students are not able to find equivalents especially when dealing with new terms that they are unfamiliar with.

## 2. Translation of the term 'earnings'

**Table 2**

*Students' translation of the term 'earnings'*

English term	Students' translations	Number of responses	Percentage
Earnings	الأرباح	16	66,66 %
	المدخول	03	13,04 %
	المداخيل	02	8,33 %
	الربح	01	4,17 %
	الفوائد	02	8,33 %
Total	05	24	100 %

Table 2 shows that all the participants translated this term. Five suggestions were given; among them seventy students (70, 83 %) have scored the highest rate and translated the term literary as "الربح and الأرباح". Five other students (21, 37%) translated the term using word – for – word method such a "المدخول، المداخيل" which cannot be considered as the right translation. Only two students translated the term into "الفوائد" which is acceptable, but it is not the right translation in the field of business. Yet, the right answer is "الإيرادات". These results indicate that the students are not familiar with the vocabulary of business English.

### 3. Translation of the term 'refund'

Table 3

*Students' translation of the term 'refund'*

English term	Students' translations	Number of responses	Percentage
Refund	إعادة الصندوق	01	4,17 %
	الديون	10	4,17 %
	تسديد الديون	70	29,16%
	إعادة المبلغ	20	,33 %8
	وثيقة تأمين	02	,33 %8
	رد مالي	02	,33 %8
	إعادة المال / الأموال	07	29,73 %
	No answer	02	,33 %8
Total	07	24	100 %

The results in Table 3 represent that none of the students gave the appropriate equivalent of the term, but seven of them were close to the right answer by translating the term as "تسديد الديون" which may be acceptable because they tried to preserve the meaning. Ten students (42, 23%) translated the term literally, where three suggestions were given: "إعادة الصندوق, إعادة المبلغ, وإعادة المال / الأموال"; these translations are not the right equivalents of the term. For the remaining students, two of them did not answer (8, 33 %) because of their unfamiliarity with the term; for the others (20, 83%), they mistranslated the term by giving wrong answers.

### 4. Translation of the terms 'capital base'

Table 4

*Students' translation of the term 'capital base'*

English term	Students' translations	Number of responses	Percentage
Capital Base	قاعدة رأس المال	06	%25
	رأس المال	90	37,5 %
	رأس مال أولي	10	4,17%
	No answer	80	33,33 %
Total	30	24	100 %

Table 4 indicates that the first answer which is “قاعدة رأس المال” is the most accurate one. This suggestion was given by six students (25 %) and it is the exact translation of the term; however, ten students (41, 67%) tried to translate the term, but they did not succeed in giving the accurate translation; so, they mistranslated it and their answers are considered as wrong. For the remaining eight students (33, 33 %), it seems that it was difficult for them to translate the term so they did not provide an answer.

### 5. Translation of the term ‘expense’

Table 5

*Students’ translation of the term ‘expense’*

English term	Students’ translations	Number of responses	Percentage
Expense	إنفاق	02	8,33 %
	تكلفة	10	, 17 %4
	مصاريف	30	13,04 %
	مصروف	40	16,66 %
	نفقة	12	49,46 %
	الثلث	01	4,17 %
	No answer	01	4,17 %
Total	60	24	100 %

According to the students’ translation portrayed in Table 5, most of the students are not familiar with the term. Many of them (57, 79%) translated the term literally such as: “نفقة” and “إنفاق” which is correct in another context but not in this one.

Three students (13, 04 %) gave the accurate translation which is “مصاريف”, by using free translation of meaning as a method. It is worth noting that four students (16, 66 %) were close enough to the right answer by suggesting “مصروف” as an answer, but they did not give the exact translation.

The two remaining students (8, 33 %) tried to give an equivalent to the term, but their answers were wrong. In addition, only one student did not provide an answer.

## 6. Translation of the term 'mass market'

Table 6

*Students' translation of the term 'mass market'*

English term	Students' translations	Number of responses	Percentage
Mass Market	العام السوق	01	4,17 %
	السوق الضخمة	01	4,17 %
	السوق الشامل	04	16,66 %
	سوق البضائع	02	8,33 %
	كتلة السوق	02	8,33 %
	سوق الجملة	04	16,66 %
	السوق العالمي	02	8,33 %
	السوق	03	13,04 %
	تجمعات تجارية	03	13,04 %
	السوق الكبيرة	02	8,33 %
Total	10	24	100 %

Table 5 indicates that none of the students succeeded in giving the accurate translation of the term. Most of the students (58, 33%) translated the term by using literal translation as a method as in "السوق الضخمة"; their translation is far away from the right answer. Two students (8, 33 %) translated the term as "كتلة السوق" which is a word – for – word translation; this latter is sometimes acceptable when used in other contexts but not in this one. The remaining students (34, 41%) gave wrong answers such as "سوق البضائع", which is neither close to the meaning nor to the exact translation.

## 7. Translation of the term 'stock exchange'

Table 7

*Students' translation of the term 'stock exchange'*

English terms	Students' translations	Number of responses	Percentage
Stock Exchange	تبادل المخزون	01	4,17 %
	خزينة التبادل	10	4,17 %
	مخازن	10	4,17 %
	تبادل السلع	01	4,17 %
	سوق المالية	10	4,17 %
	مخزون تجاري	10	4,17 %
	مخزون التبادل	60	25 %
	مخزن المبادلات	04	16,66 %
	بورصة	05	20,82 %
	أوراق نقدية	02	8,33 %
	No answer	01	4,17 %
	Total	10	24

Table 7 represents that most of the students (54, 16%) rendered the meaning literally تبادل مخزون التبادل، مخزون السلع، تبادل السلع، خزينة التبادل، المخزون، and "مخزن المبادلات" by means of word - for - word as a method because they find it easier to translate this way even if they do not convey the exact meaning. Yet, six students (25 %) succeeded to provide the right answer by finding the equivalent of the term; It is worth noting that five of them (20, 82 %) translated the term freely by using only one single word in the Arabic language. For the remaining students, they gave wrong answers, which are considered as mistranslations.

## 7. Translation of the term 'supermarket'

Table 8

*Students' translation of the term 'supermarket'*

English term	Students' translations	Number of responses	Percentage
Supermarket	سوق كبيرى	01	4,16 %
	الأسواق	06	25 %
	مراكز تجارية	04	16,67 %
	محلات سوبرماركت	04	16,67%
	اسواق تجارية	06	25 %
	No answer	03	12,5 %
Total	05	24	100 %

In Table 8, it is portrayed that almost all students translated the term by using literal translation as a method, focusing on its meaning according to their background knowledge. Many students divided the term into two parts in order to get its equivalent in Arabic like: "محلات سوبرماركت". However, it is noticed that although their translations are close to the meaning like "مراكز تجارية", they did not succeed in giving the exact equivalent of the word as it is in this context.

## Conclusion

The results obtained from the test reveal that the translation of the business terms given to students is a difficult task for the students. This is mainly because many of them mistranslated the terms or they did not provide an answer. The reason behind that is their weak background knowledge when it comes to business vocabulary. In addition, the outcome of the study portrays that even when students are aware of the effectiveness of free translation of meaning, they tend to use literal translation as a method especially when they are stuck in finding the Arabic equivalent. This results in change of meaning and not finding equivalents to the source language terms. Moreover, it is worth to point out the limited vocabulary of students which makes them unaware of how to use translation strategies or how to replace one with the other when it comes to finding exact equivalents. Thus, this prevents them from understanding the business terminology and stops them from finding the accurate translation in the target language, and eventually leads them to mistranslations or even giving very wrong translations.

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