The English Department in the Arab World Re-Visited: Language, Literature, or Translation? A Student’s View

Abstract

The remarkably prolonged controversial issue of which academic component among language, linguistics, literature and translation must be given the priority and take precedence over the other in the English departments in the Arab World during the college years has not only preoccupied a number of specialists and scholars in the field for a considerably long period of time, but has always created a rift between them. However, the resultant conflicting writings, which in turn have persistently treated the subject from the professorial perspective, have lamentably ignored discussing it from the students’ viewpoint. This is the main focus of this study in an attempt to add something new to a long-held and open-ended controversy and to find out which of these sub-specializations has more value for the graduating Arab student. This article also seeks to describe the situation of the English Departments in the Arab world, drawing attention to a practical issue faced by all English departments in the non-English-speaking countries where most students cannot and need not digest all the literature content of the English-speaking world. But students want to learn more practical language and translation skills for their future careers. And thus, they are unaware of the objectives, philosophy, and the reason-d’être of universities, that they are not vocational schools necessarily and must teach humanities and subjects related to the human mind such as literature and cognition to produce future leaders in all different fields of human knowledge as they encourage students to develop the skills they would like to acquire through their studies toward an English degree.

The study attempts to have a new look at an old subject through surveying the opinions of 75 English majors in their fourth year in the English Department at the Hashemite University, Jordan, to know the students’ preferences in isolation from the opinions of
their instructors and the prevailing educational policies, and study-plan requirements. Students were asked to express their likes and dislikes in an essay. There were no specific questionnaire items other than asking them to write a full-length essay on the central issue to figure out which component they prefer: language/linguistics, literature or translation? The respondents’ essay-answers show that some prefer language/linguistics; some literature; others translation for reasons that have demonstrated a range of positions which vary from future expectations, to market demands, to personal preferences more or less. The essays also show that there are considerable differences between the past and the present. The traditional competition between literature and linguistics has broadened to include translation, which, in turn, has led to a considerably stimulating tripartite view.

1. Introduction

English departments of Arab universities have been in an uncertain state of direction from the very beginnings for lack of a specific educational policy on whether emphasis should be given to language and linguistics, or literature, or simultaneously both. Leanings toward English literature have always been evident, but course offerings and faculty recruitment show a general lack (if not absence) of direction. Although the English language is used broadly throughout the Arab World, English departments have, in a way, failed to produce linguistically competent graduates. On the assumption that Arab universities should turn out graduates who can work effectively toward the social and economic needs of their countries, it is assumed that English departments should teach the English language and provide an understanding of the culture it belongs to rather than try to acculturate Arab students into the English language native-speaker system as they have traditionally done. The necessary, basic English language skills include spoken and written communicative fluency, reading and translation skills, and research capability. In addition, English departments should contribute to a better international and intercultural understanding, collaborate with other departments to provide a broad-based, high quality education, serve the English language needs of other departments, and direct graduate programs in applied linguistics and English as a foreign language.
The question of teaching more language and linguistics courses at the expense of literature, or vice versa, in English departments in the Arab World has attracted the attention of a number of specialists and scholars of these disciplines for a long period of time. Apparently, this issue continues to stimulate sporadic scholarly discussions, a fact which affirms the subject’s long-held, on-going controversy (cf. Culler (1977), Said (1979), Lynn (1984), Hicks (1989), and Khowlah (2002). The relevant conflicting writings produced in this respect were initially triggered by a conference held in Jordan in 1983 (Dahiyat and Ibrahim 1983, Dahiyat 1983, Asfour 1983 and Munroe 1985), and the debate has ceaselessly smoldered ever since. Each specialist was in a way fighting his/her own corner in bid to put forth a watertight argument that his/her specialty is the more adequate vehicle for graduating students with a decent flair of the English language. Zughoul (1983 & 1987) and Bader (1992), for example, argue for linguistics courses, while John (1986) and Obeidat (1997) advocate literature. Although it largely concerns the Arab World, the subject under discussion constitutes a valid point of interest in any country where large numbers of non-native speakers graduate with degrees in English. It is, therefore, clear that the subject has only been tackled from the literary standpoint, and a language and linguistics standpoint by learned, intellectual, qualified and educated people, i.e., it has been tackled from the professor point of view in both directions. Therefore, the present study focuses on the students, and thus, it attempts to re-visit this peculiarly controversial subject and investigate it from a student point of view so as to close such a gap and provide fresh insight into the unceasing, heated debate.

Before presenting our findings, let us review some of the notions put forward by different scholars and researchers. Available literature reveals that contributors to this intriguing debate could be rightly divided into three camps: the linguistic, the literary, and the moderate. Those who subscribe to the linguistic camp are in favor of the view that language and linguistics courses are of much more pragmatic and practical value for students in their future careers, while those who adhere to the literary camp maintain the view that literature courses are far more useful than those in language and linguistics. The third camp expresses moderation through leveling out the debate, as they call for incorporating the two components. Accordingly, the first two camps have continuously been striving to persuade English departments across the Arab World to amend their
study plans and curricula by introducing more courses in the respective specialization (or component) being advocated by them.

2. The language and Linguistics Camp

A good number of language specialists and linguists have criticized the dominance of literature courses over language and linguistics courses, while lamenting the presence of foreign literature that they firmly believe to conflict with the cultural, moral and ethical values of the recipient students. This camp can be represented by Makthari (2003), Zughoul (1986 & 1987), Bader (1992), Wilkins (1977) and Minnis (1971). The claim frequently made by the adherents of this camp is that the abundance of literary courses has been, to a certain extent, the cause of the failure of English departments in the Arab World to produce students who are fluent in foreign languages and who are, armed not only with literary knowledge, but also with language and linguistic training to meet the professional demands of the world. More specifically, this camp often undervalues the English literature courses at the university level and posits that literature impedes the students’ advancement language-wise. According to some scholars, all students’ class activities boil down to “glossing vocabulary items,” (Obeidat, 1997:31).

Zughoul (1987) conducted a seminal study in which he strongly advocates more language and linguistics courses in any English department in the Arab world. In this particular study, Zughoul examined the curricula of a number of English departments at Arab universities (the universities of Baghdad, Iraq; Damascus, Syria; Kuwait, Kuwait; Yarmouk, Jordan; Amman, Jordan) and the two American universities in the region. He concluded that the curricula of these departments (with the exclusion of the American University of Beirut) are heavily dominated by the literature component. In another study (1986:11) Zughoul stresses:

"The other two components of the syllabus--language and linguistics--are clearly under represented in the curriculum, with the language component the weakest of all. It typically includes two courses in communication skills and a course in writing. Rarely does a department in a Third World country offer solid language training, i.e., training in reading comprehension, listening comprehension, term paper writing, or speech. It is assumed that the incoming student is proficient in the language and that he needs no
further language training. This unrealistic assumption is, to a great extent, responsible for the failure of English departments in Third World countries to respond to the needs of the communities they are supposed to serve."

Considering the view that the language of literature deviates from natural or common language, Zughoul (ibid.), questions the validity of incorporating the literature component in the English department of a Third World country. The language of poetry, for example, is discarded by Zughoul as too deviant for his own as well as for other linguists' attention. Zughoul further argues that students' knowledge of English and American literature is irrelevant to their work demands following their graduation. He also suggests that students who graduate with a B.A. in English language and literature at any Arab university often stick to the teaching profession, or, at best, to some clerical and administrative work, whereas the graduate's knowledge of literature is hardly useful to students in anything whatsoever. On the contrary, it is the linguistic competence that is called upon in extremely pressurized workplaces. Zughoul (ibid.) concludes that it is only the linguistic competence of the graduate student that prepares him/her to assume a job that can meet the needs of his/her (Arab) community. He finally affirms his belief that the knowledge of English language appears to be too distinct from the knowledge of English and American literature.

In a more recent study (2003) entitled "Globalization and EFL/ESL Pedagogy in the Arab World," Zughoul stresses that English is still badly needed in the Arab World for the purposes of communicating with the world, education, acquisition of technology and development at large. Teaching English as a language of globalization entails changes in the older approaches for the teaching of the language. It implies consolidating the teaching of the native language, empowering the learner to have more self-confidence through learning English, teaching the language as a foreign not a second language, and introducing changes into the curriculum to respond to the needs of the learner and those of the society. Towards the end of his study, Zughoul strongly contends (ibid: 135-137) that shifts of emphasis have to be made in the teaching of language skills, especially in reading and writing.

The commonly held view here in the Arab World is that literature employs language, which is blatantly different from the standard or daily language used by the speaker of
any given speech community. To like-minded scholars, literature extensively uses language with greater care and complexity than the average user is able to produce. This situation makes teachers grind to a halt when it comes to explaining literary texts of all kinds—poems, short stories, novels and plays, and it contributes to a lack of exposure to linguistic techniques which are more likely to simplify and identify meaning.

3. The Literature Camp

The proponents of this camp support the view that literature is the only viable component that can foster and enhance language learning. This camp can be best represented by Salih (1986), Obeidat (1996 & 1997) and Webster (1990). Based on a survey of 118 Arab students majoring in English, Salih summarizes his opinion arguing for the case this way:

"The student survey shows that language skills seem to develop through studying literature in English. The positive impact of literature in language skills is by no means novel, since students exercise or practice all of the skills in literature courses. During a literature class, they are required to listen to what an instructor is saying, they must jot down notes, they often ask or answer questions, and they are frequently required to read passages relevant to the idea(s) under consideration." (Salih 1986:25).

Likewise, Obeidat (1997) addresses an on-going controversy pertinent to the respective roles of language and literature in teaching English to Muslim Arab students. Professor Obeidat reviews the case against literature, examines the actual teaching of language vs. literature, and ultimately makes a case for teaching literature in the language classroom. He (1997) vehemently argues in favor of literature teaching, especially English literature in the Arab universities; he has criticized the present practice of teaching more linguistics courses in these universities. Obeidat equates language courses with linguistics courses such as Morphology, Syntax, Phonology, etc. In order to test the conflicting claims regarding the place of literature in the curriculum in the Arab world, he examines the curricula of the same English departments as Zughoul (1987) as well as some other departments at different Arab universities including the universities of the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Bahrain, Sultan Qaboos (Oman), King Saud (Riyadh, Saudi Arabia), Damascus, Tashreen, al-Ba’th (Syria), Sfax, al-Kairouan (Tunisia),
Mohamed Ben Abdellah (Meknes, Morocco), and Alexandria (Egypt). One of the conclusions Obeidat draws is that English departments of the universities of the Arab World are actually heavily dominated by the language and linguistics component more than by anything else. To this effect, he maintains (ibid.:32-33) “a close review of the English curriculums of the universities of the Arab World not only shows a lack of interest in English literature and, therefore, culture, but also reflects the degree to which literature in English departments in this part of the world has been pushed into the background.”

Obeidat’s argument culminates upon making an overarching statement, which aptly expresses the thrust of his study, that is, “I support the view that literature, not language/linguistics is what is needed to help English departments upgrade their offerings and standards, on the one hand, and to streamline them with the Arab World's practical, albeit, pressing educational and cultural needs, on the other hand” (ibid.:33). Following this statement, Obeidat brings language and linguistics under close scrutiny by questioning the efficacy and reliability of the branches and sub-branches of the afore-mentioned subjects in bettering students’ language proficiency, i.e., by questioning how applicable are the "fruitless linguistic trees" (ibid:34) and the semantic, syntactic, morphological, and phonological rules, principles, functions, theories, and structures to the dire needs of graduates whose major specialization is English language, and who ought yet to come to terms with employment concerns and misgivings, since job vacancies do not exceed the post of a schoolteacher, a translator, a clerk, or a bank administrative employee. To this end, he bluntly states (ibid: 33), “without immediate acquaintance with words and idioms in their actual context of literature, the formal knowledge of grammar and grammatical rules alone is futile, if not worthless!” Towards the end of his study, Obeidat proposes a solution that he deems feasible, beneficent and remedial to the havoc caused by language and linguistics courses. The suggested solution is self-evident when he maintains, “It is the argument of this paper that the inadequacies of teaching of linguistics can be overcome if Arab and non Arab-learners are exposed to English literature through various forms of writing including fiction, poetry, drama, and the essay. That alone can make up for the deficiencies, if not narrowness, of the language and linguistics courses” (ibid: 34).
4. The Moderate Camp

The supporters of this camp, on the other hand, attempt to strike a balance between the first two camps as they believe that both components (i.e. ‘language and linguistics’ and literature) should be assimilated in the curricula and study plans of the English departments of the Arab World. In other words, they believe that each of these components enriches students in its own way and thus both can perfect students’ language skills and be of practical value later on in the future. This camp can be represented by Chomsky (1965), John (1986), Shabka 1987, Haggan (1999) and Faiq (2003). A prominent scholar who best represents this camp is Haggan (1999). Haggan (1999:24) believes that “the hoped-for language improvement does not take place simply from the student’s exposure to either linguistics or literature classes, and it is a sad fact that all too many students graduate with a knowledge of transformational grammar and Shakespeare’s plays but without having attained the ability to produce well-constructed, error-free sentences in English.” In her study, Haggan (ibid.) administers a detailed open-ended questionnaire to 71 students in the two final years of the English Department of Kuwait University where she asks them a number of questions about their feelings and attitudes vis-à-vis what they were studying. The results reveal that students are motivated to specialize in English language, to secure a good job. Thus, “neither the love of literature nor [that of] linguistics figured significantly in their responses. In fact, it was not uncommon to encounter students with a very vehement dislike of either discipline” (ibid: 25).

Based on such results, Haggan concludes her study by putting forward four moderate, tenable solutions as follows (ibid: 25):

1. Let literature and linguistics be the chosen specializations of those students who show a genuine interest in and aptitude for these subjects and a sufficient command of the language. This would rule out the misconception that these subjects are being taught "merely” as the means to raise the language performance of students who can barely struggle through even the most basic of English texts. Such an approach would drastically cut down on the numbers of undergraduates entering these disciplines, but would certainly make for a more satisfying professional experience for the academic teacher.
2. If current student numbers are to be maintained along with the existing literature/linguistics emphasis, a much greater stringency has to be applied in language proficiency teaching and testing before allowing students to embark on these specialized courses. This may mean that some of the academic courses may have to be sacrificed for more language skills courses or that students may have to spend more time taking non-credit language skills courses. Whichever method is chosen, students should be required to demonstrate a serviceable standard of English in a rigorous test of language proficiency.

3. If we listen to the voice of students and future employers then the literature/linguistics emphasis may not be appropriate. Students taking part in my questionnaire stated categorically that the aim in joining the department was to improve their English and not to become linguistics or literature specialists. This seems to me to be a viable position. However, the problem is to ensure the continued status of English departments as centers of academic scholarship and to avoid their developing into some kind of vocational training institutes. One way to deal with this might be to retain some basic literature and linguistics courses and to expand the content orientation. There are many well-written and intellectually challenging works in English beyond the range of linguistics or literature that might be more mentally appealing to the students than what they are currently required to read. Where there is interest, the language will follow.

4. Allow for a greater infusion of translation training into the degree program. Training in translation offers the chance of combining the literary, the linguistic, and the practical. It would satisfy some of society’s needs in relation to English graduates. It would also require similar language prerequisites as outlined in (3) above.

Finally, Haggan expresses her moderate argument when, in the end, she underscores that English departments should be aware of the fact that societies and individuals have different needs and offer venues which cater for these disparaging predilections and tastes. She explicitly states (ibid.:25) “We need not focus on whether linguistics or literature lead to better proficiency as there is room for both. We only need remember that our common aim is to provide a good, intellectually challenging language education for our students and recognize that what suits one individual may not suit another.”
Our own study is based on a survey of the opinion of 75 B.A. English majors at the Hashemite University, Jordan, to see what the students' preferences are, apart from the opinions of their instructors and the prevailing educational policies and departmental requirements, by reporting their own liking and disliking in writing. The study shows that some of the students prefer language/linguistics; some literature; and others translation for reasons that have varied from future expectations, to market demands, to personal likings.

5. The Empirical Study

Whereas it is axiomatic to argue that linguistic and literary studies in the Arab World have, until very recently, gained equally similar interest and mutual relevance, translation, on the other hand, only recently began to occupy a similar position and status in the same realm. Until the last few years or so, the English Department in the Arab universities used, to a large extent, to imply language and linguistics, and, to a similar extent, literature, but translation was included to a lesser extent. Due to a number of drastic changes that emerged, particularly after the Cold War, the attempts to map the new world, and the growing ambitions of the West in the Arab and Muslim World, tendencies towards changing this traditionally prevailing viewpoint began to take place.

Investigating the essay-responses of the 75 fourth-year student respondents majoring in English at the Hashemite University, Jordan, it was found that a real change in the prevailing situation has dramatically appeared, a fact which springs from the political, economic, religious, social and other less important, but influential factors. What follows will be an empirical analysis of the data that the students of the current study provided. The discussion will start with the traditional view that linguistics and literature are the two constituents of "English Departments" in the Arab World. It will then proceed to the more recent ones which show considerable differences between the past and the present, and how the long-held view of the traditional competition between literature and language/linguistics now includes translation, which, in turn, leads to a fresh, binding, tripartite view.
5.1 Preference for Linguistics

Due to the economically-oriented conditions in Jordan (the country of the study) and because of the job opportunities that graduates of linguistics may enjoy, some respondents prioritized this major. Indeed, this can also be a politically oriented issue; it comes as a consequence of the first Gulf War, where many Jordanians lost their jobs in the Gulf States because of the Jordanian political stand. Job vacancies can cross the borders of the linguistics realm to include ones that are exclusively thought to be for graduates of literature or translation. Among the job vacancies that may be available for graduates of linguistics, according the students, is translation which, in and of itself, requires achieving good linguistic competence. To quote some respondents, “studying linguistics provides graduates with a variety of jobs in many institutions such as schools, companies and banks, to mention only a few.” In other words, studying linguistics enables a student to be a good translator. Accordingly, it is unnecessary for any graduate of linguistics to continue her/his postgraduate study in translation.

Translation, as a way of communication, and literature, as a means of understanding one’s own culture and that of the others, can be accomplished by acquiring enough knowledge of language and a good mastery of linguistics and language rules. For some students, this standpoint gives translation and literature a secondary role in cultural communication and cultural understanding, and it marginalizes them as this communication and understanding can be achieved by the use of language and linguistics. As some respondents believe, “linguistics introduces us to language and makes us be familiar with language where we can understand our own culture and the culture of others.” Opting for linguistics and leaving the choice of literature or translation comes from the fact that the last two majors are incorporated in the first one. To put the matter differently, these two majors are represented in language, but not the opposite. Some students went even further, saying that it is impossible to know literature or practice translation without possessing a basic and solid knowledge of linguistics. Furthermore, the intertwined relationship between language and linguistics makes it necessary for those who study languages to widen their knowledge in this field, as it
forms the rules of language and enables specialists to cope with any language progress or development. This, in turn, makes specialists more familiar with language and its use, and, therefore, enables them to overcome any language problems that may arise either in the translation process or in the study of literature.

The students' choice of linguistics was, in some cases, based on the nature of the chosen major or the subjects of the study themselves. The fact that the major does not require too much memorization led some to go for this option rather than literature. To put it in the words of some of the students, "studying linguistics does not require memorization skills, a fact which facilitates it as a major of study, in comparison with literature." For these students, logical combination of different parts of a sentence and language structures can guarantee mastering language. which, they assert, is not the case for those engaged in the study of translation or literature? For some of them, literature is not easily mastered due to the fact that it is mainly grounded in memorization and in the ability to analyze texts. Moreover, a literary work does not have a final and a clear-cut meaning to be grasped from the first reading; rather, the message to be conveyed is open-ended and can have several understandings and interpretations that may differ from one reader to another and even from one time to another for the same reader. This complicated and controversial nature of literature discourages such students from choosing it, disposing them to opt for linguistics instead. Translation, as a third choice, is linguistically-based and all that a student may need is to build sufficient competence in two or more languages, which can be achieved through the study of linguistics. As some respondents suggest, there is a strongly-based relationship between linguistics and translation, as the findings of linguistics can be applied in the practice of translation. It is, therefore, a matter of involving languages and linguistics, on which translation is based, to transfer the text. Moreover, some students prefer to study linguistics for the very sake of it. In other words, they claim to have personal motivations that push them towards this discipline.

It should be noted at this point that the subject-professor relationship was very influential in most cases. The fact that the study was conducted by professors of translation and literature motivated a large majority of the respondents to express a preference for translation and literature rather than linguistics. The majority could have turned out to be larger if they had been asked to give their names. This fact was clearly noticed in the
investigation of the views, which reflects the possibility that students may flatter their instructors in the hope of improving present and future relations with them. Another possibility is that the students may have been frank in expressing their opinions. In other words, the majority might not have been courageous enough to state openly and clearly in writing that they have the tendency to study linguistics, even though some of them may have the will and the desire to do so. To summarize, having the study conducted by professors of translation and literature made it clear that a large majority of the students would express a preference for these two majors rather than for linguistics.

5.2 Preference for Literature

Literature can be defined as the entire writings that best describe and illustrate a specific language, time, place, people, event, and culture. In the study of literature, students can have a clear image of or idea about beliefs, customs, arts and human cultural products at a particular time and place. To maintain such valuable elements, specializing in literature in postgraduate study was very influential in the choice of the subjects of the study. The reasons behind their tendency to study literature were accompanied by fairly reasonable and sound justifications.

Teaching methodology was very noteworthy in showing student preference for literature. As the written responses revealed, a large number of students were strongly impressed by the teaching methodology that their professor adopted throughout the class. According to some of them, the instructor was very successful in elucidating the literary material and presenting it in such a manner that the respondents were to opt for the literature track and not that of linguistics or translation. Some students have said: “We like the way the professor teaches this class and the way he illustrates examples from common human culture, which he seems to understand perfectly well.” The professor presented the material in many clear and simple ways; sometimes through giving illustrative examples that relay live situations of current issues and sometimes through explaining the issue in question in an easy manner that made it clear to understand. This catering for the individual differences among students urged a good number of them to make literature their first and last choice.
As maintained by some respondents, the teaching methodology on the part of their instructor seemed to have been highly associated with his character and personal traits; he was seen as endowed and empowered with certain experiences that made the respondents very pleased with his way of handling the class material. For example, he enjoyed a calm character that reflected itself in an inner quietude, aided by sound insight and educated judgment. In some respondents’ terms, “The professor had many good attributes that made many of us like his class; he was calm, gentle, and considerate, and he respected all views related to the material under discussion.” Such a character as this one relieves from whatever things that distress, agitate or disturb, and it creates a real desire in the students to opt for literature. To many, he was always gentle and calm. Being so, he set forth the best example of a model character to be followed, and he made all the issues raised in class worthy of appreciation. More importantly, the professor’s broad knowledge enabled him to shift the subjects of the study mentally to the culture(s) in question. This, according to some respondents, has given them a real “feel” of the people who belong to that culture(s), thus facilitating and making future communication with them easy and direct.

Some students were in favor of studying literature simply because it is a relatively easy way to obtain knowledge of another language and culture. There are many teaching aids available to students that can promote their task. For example, having enough websites, as recommended by the professor, can facilitate gathering and studying the required material. As they put it, “In addition to library books and references, the required material is available online and this makes it easy to obtain.” Students can do their home assignments irrespective of time and place. Having laptops sometimes enables some of the respondents to carry out their class tasks without the assistance or supervision of their instructor, which is not the case in the translation course. For example, the instructor is sometimes called upon to make corrections and modifications on the given translations that are not necessarily to be found previously translated on the website. Moreover, the long tradition of teaching literature at Jordanian universities helped build up enough materials in the libraries concerned. This again supports the idea of having the choice of literature and not translation, as the latter was only taught over the last few decades.
The nature of the course itself was a major factor in orienting some students to opt for literature. The course deals with many social issues that are loudly and clearly verbalized in literature. Literature is thus the "voice" of the society that plainly expresses its concerns and questions without hesitation. The issues that literature handles are not confined to a certain community; rather, they are universal and thus reflect the culture of the global community. According to some students, the literary dialogues that they have discovered through the study of different human communities have cleared out the clouds that have, for a long time, covered the real face of these communities. Studying literature can draw students' attention to the fact that all cultures have values and beliefs that should be respected. Having enough understanding of the culturally sensitive principles and beliefs through the study of literature can put an end to the cultural clash, and consequently inspire people to live harmoniously and peacefully, which is again another motivation for some students.

As some students have said, “the courses of literature we studied provided us with a better understanding of many cultures.” And thus they have as well positively changed their views of these cultures; for politicians, who are, in the students' view, the main cause of afflictions, do not reflect the reality of peoples and cultures. This way literature helps students understand that a nation’s culture may be more complex than the views of its politicians. On this basis, one should not give opinions and judgments of certain cultures and nations before having enough understanding of the way they behave and the values they believe in. At the political level, for example, the Arab World was heavily targeted by the West, especially by the United States of America and the United Kingdom. This political impact of the West against the Muslim Arab East, in particular, created a spirit of hatred, not only among the Arabs, but also among the Muslims at large, including those living in the West. This feeling of hatred against Western people, caused by politicians, cannot be easily diminished without a tolerant and full understanding of those people, an understanding that can, without any doubt, only be gained through the study of literature.

Other intriguing factors that helped affect the choice the students have made is the large amount of vocabulary they have come across in the course. In the view of some of them, the variety of topics has provided terminology and literary idioms which they were not acquainted with before. For example, the literary course examines issues concerned
with human relations such as racial discrimination, racism, prejudice, slavery, feminism, individualism, materialism, and religious intolerance, and other issues such as regionalism, globalization, and industrialization; religious values such as faith, belief, heaven, sin and evil; ecological and geographical elements such as forest, season, rain, desert and mountain. All these issues gave the subjects of the study a thorough and subtle understanding of the "other."

Literature can, whether directly or indirectly, introduce students to many prominent figures of different cultures. It explains those figures and presents their deeds to readers in a literary form. Students can have lessons from past events so that they can either follow or reject them. Those events and figures can be religious, political, social, economic, and educational, among many others. Indeed, dealing with different cultures, representing different times, places, events and individuals, gives students of literature some opportunity to compare and contrast these cultures; this in turn creates in the students the ability to develop critical thinking. Furthermore, reading literary texts by different writers provides students of literature with the literary backgrounds of the chief writers of these cultures. Having acquaintance of literary writers can enrich student's awareness of “the other” as such writers can be good representatives and ambassadors of the cultures they belong to.

5.3 Preference for Translation

It should, at the outset, be emphasized that translation is set up in this study as a third approach to the English Department, an approach which is theoretically based on the replacement of textual material in one language by textual material of another. This task is, however, shrouded by many difficulties, but it is very significant in cultural communication, following its revolutionary presence in the past few years. Translation is; to be sure, no less important than linguistics or literature, for this matter, and can have similar functions that are no less important. This view is strongly reflected in the justifications that accompanied the responses. As a major of study, translation may at first give an impression that it is not a fully-fledged discipline on its own merits, but a subject of study dependent on other disciplines. It is based on language and literary works. Having translation as a subject of study has its justifications, and comes as a result of the hard conditions of life.
Getting a job, for students in favor of studying translation, is a pivotal priority, at a time when most jobs are limited and hard to find, and the number of job seekers is becoming increasingly larger. Therefore, as a third specialization/subject, translation has attracted substantial interest from the students because it can offer more job opportunities than can linguistics or literature in this regard. As stated by some respondents, "studying translation enables students to work as teachers, translators, conference interpreters and tourist guides, in addition to getting better off jobs in financial institutions such as banks and companies." Besides getting promising jobs after graduation, the jobs themselves bring a range of other fringe benefits including transportation and accommodation. As some of the students have put it, “translation majors also benefit from the likely possibility of meeting with high ranking officials in media interviews, for example, which puts an extra feather in their caps!"

To a few students, translation can also be a good means for cultural communication, without which cultures remain distant (if not divided), eventually to experience absence of mutual understanding. In fact, some respondents opted for this discipline because of the massive impact of 9/11 (cultural and otherwise), an event that came to yield new terms of reference to Muslims, generally, and to Arabs, in particular. The West started to wage bitterly rigorous and rigorously bitter religious campaigns against the Muslim World and the Muslim nations. This premeditated campaign, on the other hand, was made even worse by the President of the United States of America during the invasion of Iraq. In some European countries, it extended to include the Prophet of the nation, Muhammad. Cartoons were indelibly used to wrongly depict and abuse His character. Some respondents, therefore, prefer to study translation in order for them to be able to convey the message of Islam to Western nations. To use the words of some of them: “This message can be conveyed through the translation of the Qur’an and Hadith (the Sayings of the Prophet) into English, which is a major language in the West.” Moreover, some respondents demonstrate their desire to study translation to work as cultural representatives of the Muslim community, thus reflecting the true principles and creeds of Islam and the true manners of Islam and the Muslims. Religious zeal, in this way, prompted them to ameliorate the stereotypical idea about Islam, as a developed religion, and improve the image of the Muslims as individuals. In addition, translation, among these students, is believed to be the most effective means for conveying the message of
respected Muslim scholars into English. As maintained by some respondents, scholars such as these interpreted the Qur’an and Hadith in a fairly perfect way, a task which only learned people can do.

As some student respondents have stated, “translation is a suitable means for understanding languages.” The process itself is performed through the acquisition of two or more with enough competence of the languages to make a speaker’s words or a written text understandable. The same group of respondents also stressed the fact that translation and linguistics complement each other, since having a fair amount of mastery of linguistics helps translators produce a well-written, well-composed and well-structured translated material, through the use of syntactically and grammatically proper rules. Translators are expected to write in the best grammatically, syntactically, semantically and lexically possible style. Translation is thus a practice of understanding all these diverse aspects of language functions which contribute to the production of reliable translation. Some of the same group of students maintains that translators have strong semantic skills and knowledge, as the process is generally concerned with relaying the semantic features of languages, which occupy a large portion of linguistics that is mostly targeted in translation.

A translation graduate can become broadly educated because of the different topics she/he is dealing with. According to some, translation enables students to acquire knowledge in a variety of fields. This is logically justified in light of the fact that students deal with different text-types. In other words, they can be multi-major students who deal with medical, engineering, scientific, political or religious texts, which provide them with information that they have never been exposed to, and such texts develop in them a desire to acquire basic awareness of or skills in various fields of human knowledge while translating one language into another. On this basis, they can excel linguistically, as potential specialists in these fields, and academically as linguists, whose knowledge is mostly confined to language and linguistics in this regard.

As some responses have revealed, studying translation helps students to be translators or interpreters. It enables them to have textual information from its original source. According to some students, translators have the opportunity to know about written masterpieces in a source language before the work is relayed to readers of many target
languages. Knowledge is, through them, disseminated to readers of target languages, and it is their responsibility to convey such knowledge as accurately as possible. They are responsible for the reliability of the material to be translated, and this fact grants them a position that is not likely to be granted to linguists or majors of literature. Similarly, interpreters can occupy leading positions that offer them opportunities to have information directly from conference participants, political parties’ members and decision makers—as examples. The information they obtain is free of falsehood, forgery and fabrication. On the contrary, students of linguistics or literature do not seem to have similar opportunities.

Because of its peculiar nature, some respondents have given priority to translation; not to linguistics or literature. In their view, translation is interesting, stimulating, intriguing and inspiring. It is, in a way, based on practice and this frees it from the daily routine of study that students of linguistics or literature often encounter in their academic and intellectual pursuits. Moreover, translation majors can have a variety of live situations, which cannot be available to the students of linguistics or literature. This frees students of the field from the routine that graduates of linguistics or literature encounter. To illustrate, translation graduates can work in media, where they can visit different places as media correspondents; working as such gives them the opportunity to deal with different people from different cultures and nations. In this way, translation students can become better educated and better versed by involving themselves in new situations, where they mostly find themselves integrated with non-native communities, languages and cultures through non-personal means of communication so to speak.

6. Conclusion

It can, in the end, be argued that the traditional view of language/linguistics and literature dominance in English Departments in the Arab World drastically changed over the last few decades. This change of attitude and position came as a result of the incorporation of translation in the study plans of some Arab universities, and as a consequence of internal and external changes in the new international educational system. As revealed in the investigation of the student essay-responses, the need of translation to complete the last third of the circle emerged to bridge a gap that has long been waited for.
Unlike previous studies, the present study has, we believe, succeeded in revealing the fact that language, linguistics, literature, and translation complement each other. In other words, they are based on each other, and the disregard of any one of them results in some imbalance in the others. The study has shown that the intertwined relationship between the three disciplines stems from the linguistic factor that equally binds the three majors together. Literature is displayed in language, and the translation of literature is performed by resorting to at least two languages, where linguistics forms the backbone of the translated text(s).

Investigating the responses of the student respondents (though the number of each camp is not large), it was found out that the views were clearly distinct. Some were in favor of linguistics for the fact that this major encompasses literature and translation, and provides them with the language rules to be performed in the writing of literature and the practice of translation. Other views support the study of literature because the major is very helpful in cultural communication. It depicts all the cultural components successfully, thus it consequently enables readers to have enough understanding of other nations and cultures. Still some other views were based on the economic situation of the country, Jordan. This situation urged many other subjects of the study to opt for translation because they believed it would help them secure a variety of jobs following their graduation. In other words, translation, in the opinion of some, can provide its graduates with a diversity of job opportunities that makes such a major inspiring and motivating in much the same way as the other two tracks have equally turned out to be to the society of the study, and thus the views of all three camps reflect some kind of equality and no one camp in particular has the strongest argument in as far as the findings are concerned.
Appendices

Below are segments of the students’ views as expressed in their essay-responses supporting all three tracks: linguistics, literature and translation, included as examples:

Views in Favor of Linguistics:

- Studying linguistics carries promising job opportunities.
- Understanding languages can be achieved through the study of linguistics (not literature or translation).
- The choice of vocabulary used in linguistics is easy to understand, compared to that used in literature.
- Studying translation is enclosed in the study of linguistics, not the opposite, and at the same time it cannot be enclosed in the study of literature.
- Studying literature and practicing translation can be performed through language and linguistics.
- Studying linguistics plays a major role in building and improving language skills and abilities in a certain language, but not literature or translation.
- Personal preference and motivation urged us to study linguistics.

Views in Favor of Literature:

- The character of the professor and the knowledge he had motivated us to study literature.
- The teaching methodology adopted by the professor made the material easy to understand and helped us appreciate literature.
- Studying literature contributed to understanding the views of other nations and cultures, thus reducing “the clash of civilizations.”
- Having a wide range of ways and means of collecting class material including Internet and library references.
- Literature is a good source for understanding many concepts such as regionalism, fundamentalism, racism, feminism, materialism, among many others.
• The description of certain events, places and nations gives us thorough knowledge of cultures we have never come across.

• Studying literature is interesting because it deals with issues that involve us in global human activities.

**Views in Favor of Translation:**

• Studying translation helps become freelance translators, interpreters, tourist guides, teachers, to mention but a few.

• It enables us to have good knowledge of and skills in many academic fields including different topics.

• Translation is the most proper way of exposing national culture and religion to others, and therefore it is a good means of changing negative views about us.

• Compared to linguistics and literature, translation is very interesting and this helps us be affluent in different translation activities.

• Studying translation reinforces one’s linguistic capabilities and it also exposes the individual to many literary genres.

• Translation enriches vocabulary knowledge, and it improves writing skills through the use of a wealth of words.

• Translation enables graduates to be practical in different branches of linguistics and literature. It enables them to practically deal with syntactic, semantic, stylistic, and sociolinguistic issues, and it instills in them literary competence while translating literary texts.
References


