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Translating Some English Collective Nouns into Arabic: A Case Study of Palestinian Students' Translations

Abstract

This paper seeks to unravel the intricacies involved when translating English collective nouns into Arabic by Palestinian undergraduate translation students. In English, collective nouns like *government*, *jury*, and *committee* allow both singular and plural verb agreement depending on notional or grammatical concord. On the other hand, Arabic places strict grammatical concord on collective nouns by considering them as singular entities despite their semantic plurality. Hence, this cross-linguistic difference poses translation and pedagogical concerns for translators. For the purpose of this study, a structured questionnaire was distributed to 30 students of different academic levels at Al-Najah University. The questionnaire consists of demographic questions, ten English to Arabic translation tasks involving collective nouns, and reflective questions regarding students' strategies and their perceptions about the difficulties involved. The data was analyzed thematically and demonstrated that although most students followed Arabic grammatical norms and used singular verb agreement, a minority resorted to notional translation using plural subjects (e.g., members of the committee) together with a plural verb agreement. However, difficulties that arise for students involve the singular and plural agreement, and lexical gaps. Senior students as well as students who had prior exposure to political texts tended to have more syntactic awareness and accuracy. Based on the findings of this paper, explicit instruction is needed on collective noun behavior, and notional versus grammatical agreement. In concordance with these linguistic aspects, this study contributes to translation pedagogy by focusing on context-sensitive equivalence and grammatical awareness in dealing with collective noun constructions between two typologically different languages.

Keywords: Collective nouns, grammatical concord, notional agreement, English-Arabic translation, translation pedagogy

1 Introduction

In the realm of linguistics, collective nouns constitute a challenge for translators because they represent a grammatical and semantic unit at the same time. In English, verb agreement with collective nouns, like *committee*, *government*, *jury*, and *team* can be either singular or plural, depending on the conceptual focus, whether the entity is regarded as a unified whole or as a collection (Lyons 1977: 315; Quirk & Greenbaum 1973: 177). This variability makes translation into Arabic challenging, since Arabic collective nouns are generally morphologically singular but semantically plural, and they generally take singular agreement in syntax (Al-Tameemi & Farhan 2019: 603; Dror 2016: 305).

In journalistic Arabic, collective nouns are used in ways that conform to certain grammatical and semantic patterns which may or may not correspond to English conventions (Dror

2016: 304, 326). Al-Tameemi & Farhan (2019: 603) pointed out that studies on English-Arabic translation show that translators often find difficulty with grammatical concord, especially when it comes to deciding whether to maintain singular or plural agreement in the target language. This paper examines how Palestinian translation students translate English collective nouns into Arabic and the challenges they may encounter in the process. Students from translation programs in Palestine are a particularly pertinent group for this study because they are likely to read political texts in both Arabic and English and may encounter difficulties when translating collective nouns between the two languages.

1.1 Statement of the problem

Al-Tameemi & Farhan (2019: 603) noted that the translation of English collective nouns constitutes a fundamental difficulty for Arabic speaking translation students because of disparities between “form and meaning”. In English, collective nouns can be flexible in terms of verb agreement (e.g. *the committee is/are meeting*) (de Vries 2021: 258). This is different from Arabic, where collective nouns are typically treated as singular entities (Dror 2016: 316–317, 326). Collective nouns (e.g. الجيش *al-jaysh* ‘the army’ or الشعب *al-sha’b* ‘the people’) are intrinsically singular, even when they refer to multiple individuals (Igaab & Altai 2017: 293–294). It is due to this structural difference that Arabic translators can face translation problems of either overgeneralizing the Arabic singular form or not understanding that a plural agreement is required depending on the context (Igaab & Altai 2017: 293–294). Some problematic areas have already been previously identified in translating collective nouns, such as:

- Grammatical concord issues: the variance when translating English collective nouns into Arabic often results in errors (Igaab & Altai 2017: 293–294). For instance, while the collective noun *government* may use plural agreement in British English as in *the government have announced new policies*, it is treated as singular in Arabic, resulting in possible translation inconsistencies (Dror 2016: 304–305).
- Semantic ambiguity: The grammatical meaning of collective nouns may shift based on context, which can lead to different interpretations (Igaab & Altai 2017, 288, 293–294). For instance, in English, *jury* refers to a collective body of individuals, but in Arabic, it may necessitate explicit plural markers (i.e., Board of jury). These shifts may create confusion of meaning.
- Contextual dependence: as collective nouns are used in journalistic and political texts, attention must be paid to discourse conventions of both languages (Al-Tameemi & Farhan 2019: 603). For example, *parliament* is pluralized depending on the discourse context in political Arabic (Al-Tameemi & Farhan 2019: 608), while the verb agreement may vary depending on style preferences, particularly in British English (de Vries 2021: 270, 272).

This study is particularly interesting with regard to Palestinian students of the translation major because they are likely to come across political texts in English and Arabic and be faced with particular difficulties when translating collective nouns from one language into the other.

1.2 Research questions

The following research questions are the focus of this study:

1. To what extent does the accuracy of translation of English collective nouns into Arabic differ according to the academic level of the student (Years 1–4)?
2. To what extent does the accuracy of translation of English collective nouns into Arabic differ according to the level of English proficiency?
3. What is the contribution made by prior translation experience to the accuracy of rendering collective nouns?
4. What errors of agreement could English sentences with plural or singular verbs generate when translated into Arabic, if any?
5. What are the difficulties encountered by Palestinian translation students when translating English collective nouns into Arabic?

1.3 Significance of the research

This study aims to advance our knowledge of the challenges when translating English collective nouns into Arabic. One of the major contributions of this study is that it clarifies the particular difficulties that Palestinian translation students might encounter when translating texts, particularly in relation to the use of collective nouns.

2 Literature review

2.1 Definition and Nature of Collective Nouns

Collective nouns are semantically complex lexical items which refer to groups of entities, and conceived either as a single unified whole or as a set of individual members. Lyons (1977: 315) noted that collective nouns like *government* and *family* are lexically singular, but semantically plural and allow both singular and plural verb agreement depending on the notional interpretation. Such duality is usually manifested in what is called “grammatical agreement” (according to the noun’s morphosyntactic form) and “notional agreement” (based on the semantic plurality of the noun’s referent) (Biber et al. 2021: 190; Quirk et al. 1985: 758–759).

However, collective nouns in Arabic follow other conventions structurally as well as semantically. Instead, Arabic verbal form is traditionally based on grammatical number and gender agreement and not according to the semantics of collectivity. According to Dror (2016: 305), Arabic collective nouns are usually morphologically singular, and they are expected to show number and gender agreement in syntax where they typically have the singular form. This morphosyntactic treatment poses a problem when translating from English, especially when English takes a plural agreement for collective entities (Al-Tameemi & Farhan 2019: 603).

2.2 Collective Nouns

2.2.1 English Collective Nouns

Collective nouns are one category in English which can be grammatically and semantically complex. Although they are singular in syntax, they are frequently plural, depending on the conceptualization of the group they denote. As Lyons, (1977: 315) and Quirk & Greenbaum

(1973: 177) noted, nouns such as *committee*, *jury*, and *government* can be used as singular or plural, depending on whether emphasis is placed on the collective as a whole or on it as a group of entities. This dual interpretation results in what is referred to as notional concord; the verb agrees with the notional plurality rather than the grammatical form of the subject (Igaab & Altai 2017: 289; Quirk et al. 1985: 758–759).

According to Biber et al. (2021: 190) and Levin (2001: 11) collective nouns are classified into three main types: those preferring singular agreement (e.g. *committee*, *government*), those preferring plural agreement (e.g. *staff*, *police*), and those taking both according to the context (e.g. *family*, *team*). British English is more flexible in this area, but American English tends to follow singular agreement (Johansson 1979: 205; Quirk et al. 1985: 758).

De Vries (2021: 273) clarified that collective nouns in English involve both ‘one-ness’ and ‘more than one-ness’, which may vary according to the context, semantics and speaker intention. As noted by Ritchie (2017: 465), collective predicates such as *gather* and *vote* refer to the entire group, but distributive predicates such as *eat* and *smile* apply to each individual member. Therefore, the same noun may give different verb agreement according to the type of predicate.

Under the conceptual approaches like the ones proposed by Joosten et al. (2007: 86), collective nouns can vary in terms of “member-level accessibility”, or how easily the individual members of the group are recalled from memory. In Dutch, Nouns such as *bemannig* ‘crew’ and *echtpaar* ‘married couple’ are high in member accessibility and are prone to plural agreement while *vereniging* ‘association’ and *comité* ‘committee’ are lower in this respect and tend to show singular concord (Joosten et al. 2007: 97). This matches Schwarzschild’s (1996: 9), who made a distinction between group level and individual level predication.

When collective nouns are further approached within the framework of discourse of politics, the complexity of the issues involved increases. Dror (2016: 310–311) stated that such texts signal institutional power, or ideological cohesion through the flexible interpretation of collectives. For instance, *the government have decided* may indicate a decision of government’s members taken individually while *the government has decided* treats it as a single authoritative entity. This is most central to politics and its rhetoric and style.

Table (1) comprises ten collective nouns designating humans and their concord patterns which were assembled from two reliable sources: Biber et al. (2021) who analyzed a large naturally occurring corpus of spoken and written English and Quirk et al. (1985) who describe collective nouns within the English grammatical convention. The categorization highlights whether the noun allows flexible concord (singular/plural), or preference for one pattern is dominant. The table indicates the categorization agreement from both sources (e.g., *committee*, *jury*, *family*) as well as the variation of concord patterns (e.g., *government*, *staff*, *team*).

Collective Noun	Classification	Variation
Committee	Flexible (Singular/Plural)	Quirk et al. (1985: 316, 757–759) classify both <i>committee</i> and <i>government</i> as flexible collective nouns; Biber et al.’s (2021: 190) corpus shows these collective nouns exhibiting singular preference but still allowing plural.
Government	Flexible (Singular/Plural)	
Jury	Flexible (Singular/Plural)	Quirk et al. (1985: 316) classify <i>jury</i> as a flexible collective nouns; Biber et al.’s (2021: 190) corpus shows that <i>jury</i> exhibits singular preference but still allows plural.
Family	Flexible (Singular/Plural)	Quirk et al. (1985: 316) classify <i>family</i> as flexible collective nouns; Biber et al.’s (2021: 190) corpus shows that

		<i>family</i> exhibits both singular and plural concord in BrE but prefers singular concord in AmE.
Staff	Plural preferred	Biber et al. (2021: 249) and Quirk et al. (1985: 303) conclude that <i>staff</i> is used as a collective and plural-only noun.
Police	Plural preferred	Biber et al. (2021: 290) and Quirk et al. (1985: 303) conclude that <i>police</i> is used as a collective and plural-only noun.
Team	Flexible in British English (Singular/Plural)	Quirk et al. (1985: 310, 316–317) classify <i>team</i> as flexible in BrE. Biber et al.'s (2021: 191) corpus addressed sport teams but not the term <i>team</i> . They found that proper names of sport teams have plural concord in BrE and singular concord in AmE “unless the name of the sports team is in the plural, e.g. <i>the New York Giants</i> ”
Audience	Flexible (Singular/Plural) Singular preferred	Quirk et al. (1985: 316, 758) classify <i>audience</i> as a flexible collective noun in BrE; Biber et al.'s (2021: 190) corpus shows that <i>audience</i> exhibits singular preference but still allows plural.
Public	Flexible (Singular/Plural) Singular preferred	Quirk et al. (1985: 758) classify <i>public</i> as a flexible collective noun; Biber et al.'s (2021: 190) corpus shows that <i>public</i> exhibits singular preference but still allows plural.
Crowd	Flexible (Singular/Plural) Singular preferred	Quirk et al. (1985: 758) classify <i>crowd</i> as a flexible collective noun; Biber et al.'s (2021: 190) corpus shows that <i>crowd</i> is merely a collective noun and that it is combined with a following <i>of</i> -phrase (e.g., <i>a crowd of people</i>)

Table 1. Categorization of some English collective nouns based on their preferred grammatical agreement (singular, plural, or flexible).

This categorisation shows that although English collective nouns are flexible in general, this flexibility is subject to the noun and the variety of English being used. Quirk et al. (1985: 316–317) pointed out the significance of the perspective of the speaker (i.e., whether the group is viewed as one whole or as a group of individuals). In contrast, Biber et al. (2021) emphasized distributional tendencies throughout various registers. For instance, Quirk et al. (1985: 316) characterize *government* as flexible; however, the corpus developed by Biber et al. (2021: 190) indicates a substantial singular preference when it comes to actual practice.

2.2.2 Arabic Collective Nouns

In contrast, Arabic collective nouns are rigid in terms of morphosyntactic agreement. Igaab & Altai (2017: 293–294) claim that Arabic does not allow any flexible agreement patterns and insist on grammatical concord regardless of notional plurality. Nouns such as الشعب *al-sha'b* ‘the people’ and الجيش *al-jaysh* ‘the army’ are singular grammatically and normally take singular verb forms even when they encompass more than one entity Dror’s (2016: 311).

Such rigidity is based on classical grammatical rules which give precedence to maintaining morphological consistency over semantic variability (Dror 2016: 305–306; Taqi 2012: 37). For instance, the collective noun الشرطة *al-shurṭa* ‘the police’ behaves as singular even though it denotes several officers (Dror 2016: 311). While the English plural agreement correlates with

ideological stance or conceptual focus, Arabic promotes syntactic cohesion (Fischer 2002: 187–188).

Nevertheless, there is variation from one Arabic dialect to another. According to Dhifallah (2022: 224–225), some collective nouns in Tunisian Arabic may license singular as well as plural agreement. In her corpus and questionnaire study, Arabic native speakers demonstrated tolerance for plural concord with semantically plural collectives rebuking the view that Arabic systematically treats collective nouns as singular.

In addition, Taqi (2012: 37) describes how Arabic collective nouns like قوم *qawm* ‘nation’ and رَهْط *raht* ‘group of men’, which are made up of human entities, are formed based on some root patterns, and they do not have a fixed category label in the traditional grammar. Instead, they are treated under large topic headings like the plural or the broken plural (i.e., the internal structure of the word changes (e.g. رجل *rajul* ‘man’, sing. changes to رجال *rijal* ‘men’, pl.) because of the absence of a syntactically distinctive class of collectives.

The use of collective nouns is encoded in Arabic with social, religious and cultural nuance. Dror (2016: 310–311) stated that the use of singular agreement consistently follows a pattern of unity and institutional authority as used in journalistic and political contexts. Compared to English political discourse, this contrasts with the variability in English political discourse. The following Table (2) shows some Arabic collective nouns designating humans, and their variable uses if any:

Collective Noun	Agreement Type	Reference
(al-sha'b, 'الشعب', the people)	Singular	(Dror, 2016)
(al-jaysh, 'الجيش', the army)		(Dror, 2016; Taqi, 2012)
(al-shurta, 'الشرطة', the police)		(Dror, 2016)
(raht, 'رَهْط', group)		(Taqi, 2012)
(ta'ifa, 'طائفة', sect/class)		(Taqi, 2012)
(usrah, 'أسرة', 'family')		(Taqi, 2012)
(firqa, 'فرقة', unit)		(Dror, 2016; Taqi, 2012)
(hizb, 'حزب', party)		(Dror, 2016; Taqi, 2012)
(hay'ah, 'هيئة', institution)		(Dror, 2016)
(al-qawm, 'القوم', the nation / the people)	Plural	(Dror, 2016; Taqi, 2012)
(m'shar, 'مَعشَر', 'people')		(Dror, 2016)
(shi'a, 'الشَّيعَة', 'the Shiah')		(Dror, 2016)
(ahl, 'أهل', 'residents')		(Dror, 2016)

Table 2. Categorization of some Arabic collective nouns, and their classification
(as singular in form but plural in meaning).

2.3 Concord with English and Arabic Collective Nouns

2.3.1 Concord with English Collective Nouns

In English, concord with collective nouns syntactically is considered a very important factor determining relative agreement between the noun and its accompanying pronouns or verbs. According to the Anglo-Saxon tradition, a collective noun has quite a unique flexibility in concord that it can combine with either singular or plural kinds of forms (de Vries 2021: 261). For example, the noun *committee* can be accompanied by either a singular verb or plural verb. The following examples illustrates this principle:

(1) The committee has met, and it has rejected the proposal.

(2) The committee have met, and they have rejected the proposal.

In the first sentence, the noun *committee* functions as a single unit leading to singular agreement with the verb and the pronoun. However, in the second sentence, the noun *committee* functions as a set of individuals leading to plural agreement with the verb and the pronoun. Nouns such as *family*, *audience*, and *team* exhibit similar behavior, since agreement changes when the group is construed as a single unit or as separate individuals. Such a syntactic deviation is mostly used with collective nouns denoting animate beings (de Vries 2021: 261). The following exemplify the concord categories of English collective nouns (Biber et al. 2021: 190; Levin 2001:11; Wong 2009: 8–12):

(1) Singular Concord: this category is utilized when the collective noun refers to a unified entity. For Example:

(3) The government is introducing new regulations

(2) Plural Concord: this category is utilized when the collective noun refers to the individual members. For Example:

(4) The staff are preparing for the annual meeting

(3) Mixed Concord: this category is utilized when the verb and pronoun shift within the same clause and refer to the same collective noun. For Example:

(5) The family has decided to relocate, but they are unsure of the timing

However, it is worth noting that variable concordance is not applicable to all nouns used in English. Such syntactic flexibility is usually not allowed by inanimate collective nouns such as *forest* or *archipelago*. For instance, while one would say *the forest is dense*, it is incorrect to write that sentence as *the forest are dense*. This syntactic differentiation supports the Anglo-Saxon tradition of linking variable concord with animate collective nouns; thus, serving to help consolidate the basis for defining English collective nouns from a purely linguistic perspective (de Vries 2021: 261).

From a different perspective, de Vries (2021) has made an important contribution to the research on collectives by discussing the syntactic and semantic properties of different languages in a highly well-organized way, especially concerning the condition of number agreement, the variability of concord, and the cross-linguistic typology. Bock et al. (2006: 64) established that speakers of British and American English are probably equally likely to follow a singular collective noun phrase (NP) with a plural pronoun, posing a challenge to the notion of concord traditionally presumed.

De Vries (2021: 272) emphasized the significance of investigating how collective nouns are conceptualized. She claimed that speakers' preferences in opting for singular or plural agreement rely on the collective noun itself.

2.3.2 *Concord with Arabic Collective Nouns*

Unlike English, Arabic has a fixed agreement system for collective nouns, as grammatical concord is the bulk of the mechanism. Collective nouns are almost always treated as singular in

form (i.e. they have singular verb agreement) and are singular in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) even when the reference is to more than one individual (Dror 2016: 305–306, 326). The following example from Dror (2016: 319) illustrates this principle:

- (6) بدأ الجيش الإسرائيلي تنفيذ خطته الواسعة (bada' al-jaysh al-israeli tanfidh khutatih alwasi'a) → the Israeli army began (sing.) to carry out its broad plan.

Although الجيش (*al-jaysh*, 'the army') refers to a group of soldiers, it remains singular in grammatical agreement. Arabic, however, does allow plural agreement in some cases:

- In explicit reference to individual people within the collective (Dror 2016: 316–317):

- (7) أفراد الشرطة يحاولون القبض على الجاني (afrad al-shurta yohaweloun al-qabd ala al-jani) → the police officers are trying to capture the criminal.

- In some of the dialectal variations (mainly in Tunisian Arabic), the order of words may influence the verb agreement (Dhifallah 2022: 228–230):

- (8) الطلاب ذهبوا الى المكتبة (al-tullab dhahabu ila al-maktaba) → the students went (plural) to the university.

- With certain human-related collective nouns (Taqi 2012: 52):

- (9) القوم متحدون (al-qawm mutahidoun) → the people are united.

2.4 Translating Collective Nouns (Implications and Pedagogical Concerns)

According to de Vries (2021: 270–271) collective nouns demonstrate cross-linguistic variation in their agreement behavior; for example, plural agreement with singular collective nouns is not only found in British English but also in Spanish, Old Church Slavonic, Samoan, Tuvaluan and some other languages. Hence, translators might encounter difficulties in terms of preserving syntactic grammaticality. Based on the Anglo-Saxon tradition, English collective nouns exhibit flexibility in concord which allows singular or plural agreement based on the conceptualization of the group (de Vries 2021: 261). Examples of collective nouns in English such as *committee* need consideration of concord patterns, since they allow both singular or plural agreement with the verb depending on the 'point of view' (Quirk et al. 1985: 316–317), whereas Arabic is more likely to use singular agreement in such cases.

The difference between English and Arabic in dealing with collective nouns is very significant as far as translation is concerned. Transferring from English to Arabic needs not only morphological agreement but also pragmatic equivalence and discourse conventions. According to Al-Tameemi and Farhan (2019: 610), English collective nouns with plural agreement may lead to syntactic or semantic errors in Arabic when they are translated literally in Arabic.

Collective nouns are especially problematic for students of translation, who are prone to committing errors because of overgeneralization and the dissimilarity of grammatical behaviour among languages (Al-Tameemi & Farhan 2019: 610; Igaab & Altai 2017: 293–294). In addition, student translations often do not mirror the English collective nouns' contextual nuances, which, though not always transferable to Arabic because of its more rigid agreement

system, may in other cases be expressed by other lexical items, or syntactic rewording (Al-Tameemi & Farhan 2019: 610).

These findings turn out to be of great importance on the pedagogical level. According to Tran and Bui (2021: 137–138), the semantic properties of collective nouns should be explicitly taught to the non-native learners. If such instruction is not provided, learners could simply memorize the lists without cognizing the grammatical or contextual patterns which will in turn result in poor translation performance. Ritchie (2017: 465, 468) also pointed out the differences between distributive, collective, and group-level predicates, remarking that there exists a significant conceptual difference among these predicate categories in their syntactic interaction with a collective noun, e.g., in explaining the meaning and agreement. These differences are crucial in the work of the translator in the political or journalistic sphere as the predicate type's interpretation may change the intended meaning of the phrase.

Joosten et al. (2007: 114) and Levin (2001: 28) concluded that syntactic variability in English frequently correlates to semantic profiling so that translation requires a fine understanding of the form and the functional concept of English.

3 Methodology

This study examines how Palestinian translation students translate English collective nouns into Arabic and explores the difficulties they encounter in the process if any. A thematic analysis approach is used through a questionnaire-based translation task integrating qualitative evaluation on students' translations and reflections. This section presents the research design, participant selection criteria, data collection, data analysis and analysis methods.

3.1 Research Design

The study follows a descriptive qualitative approach by using thematic analysis to explore any patterns in students' translation strategies, error tendencies, and challenges. The main data collection tool is a structured questionnaire designed to answer the research questions. It includes three main sections: demographic information, a translation task and reflection questions.

3.2 Participants

The study includes 30 Palestinian students enrolled in a bachelor's translation program at Al-Najah University in Palestine. To be able to compare performance of translation at different learning stages, participants are drawn from various years (i.e., years 1, 2, 3 and 4). Both male and female students are included among the participants to gain gender diversity in responses. Selected students have at least an intermediate (B1) level in English as a key inclusion criterion.

This criterion is evident as students are not allowed to join the translation program without evaluation through a test made by the department. Experience in translating journalistic texts is not required of the participants, but their exposure to journalistic discourse is documented to detect if translation experience affects the performance. The study includes students from various academic levels in order to examine whether translation performance is related to academic progression.

3.3 Data Collection Tools

Google Forms was used to administer the questionnaire which consists of three sections: demographic data, a translation task, and reflection questions. It is structured to obtain both numerical translation accuracy data and students' qualitative reflections.

In the first section, demographic information like age, gender, academic year, English proficiency level and experience with translating journalistic texts are collected. This section helps in classifying the participants according to their academic progress and language skills for comparative analysis.

The second section includes a translation task of ten English sentences with collective nouns. Each sentence is to be translated into Arabic by the students. The sentences are chosen to check collective noun agreement of singular type, plural type, and the flexible type nouns. The task determines if the students follow Arabic grammatical concord rules or inappropriately transfer English collective noun structures.

The third section comprises reflection questions for qualitative purposes intended to investigate students' translation strategies and perceived difficulties. This exploratory research examines whether students were aware of English collective noun flexibility, whether they struggled with singular or plural agreement in their attempts to translate into Arabic, and to what extent they relied on rules of grammar or meaning in context in making their translations, especially when the English source sentence contains a plural verb. The difference between following the rules of grammar and following the meaning of a sentence in context can only be clearly traced when the English source sentence includes a plural verb. When a sentence in English is constructed using a singular verb, the use of the singular verb in Arabic may reflect either grammar (Arabic concord rules) or conceptualization of the noun's referent as a unit. In these scenarios, it is not clear where the choice arises.

3.4 Data Analysis Methods

Data collected from the questionnaire is manually analysed using thematic analysis. The translations are grouped into patterns depending on their grammatical accuracy and on context appropriateness. There are three main categories of the responses:

1. Accurate translation: Arabic responses that reflect accurate application of Arabic grammatical concord and correct translation of the intended meaning of the English collective noun.
2. Partially correct translation: Arabic responses which communicate the general meaning, but they are grammatically inconsistent, resulting in an incorrect verb agreement.
3. Incorrect translations: Arabic responses which reflect two major issues i.e., the collective noun is mistranslated, and the singular/plural agreement is incorrect.

Moreover, the students' responses on the reflective questions are classified into key themes using thematic coding. It seeks to find common translation difficulties, strategies used in making decisions, and knowledge of collective noun flexibility. Hence four themes mostly expected to come out of the responses include grammatical challenges, semantic challenges, contextual awareness, and literal vs. functional translation preference.

4 Analysis

4.1 Participants Demographics

The data for the analysis comes from the responses of 30 Palestinian undergraduate students studying in the translation program. The demographic profile of their characteristics is given in Table (3) below. Most of the sample was young adults (90% were aged 18–22 years old) and was 60% female. The largest group was in Year 4 and academic levels spanned from first to fourth year undergraduates. The participants' self-rated English proficiency was mostly intermediate to advanced (B1–C1) and 57% had some prior experience in translating journalistic or political texts, while 17% had extensive experience.

Variable	Categories	Frequency
Age group	18–22	27
	23–27	3
Gender	Male	12
	Female	18
Academic level	Year 1	6
	Year 2	5
	Year 3	7
	Year 4	12
English Proficiency	Intermediate (B1)	8
	Upper Intermediate (B2)	10
	Advanced (C1)	8
	Near-Native (C2)	4
Translation Experience	No experience	8
	Some (academic/personal)	17
	Extensive (professional)	5

Table 3. Demographic Distribution of Participants

Table (4) below illustrates a comparative breakdown across the four properties (i.e., academic level (years 1–4), proficiency level (self-rated English proficiency), experience level (self-exposure to journalistic/political texts), and verb form (plural vs singular English verbs of the source sentences). The table compares the translations of English collective nouns into Arabic as rendered by students. The translations are categorized as correct, partially correct, or incorrect and given in both percentages (%) and raw counts (n) for each subgroup. The last column shows the error type that was most prevalent in that subgroup, whether it was a result of lexical selection (i.e., inappropriate collective noun synonyms) or agreement errors (i.e., wrong verb number).

Property	Level	Correct (n)	Correct (%)	Partially correct (n)	Partially correct (%)	Incorrect (n)	Incorrect (%)	Error type dominance
Academic level	1	54	90.0	6	10.0	0	0.0	Agreement
	2	45	90.0	5	10.0	0	0.0	Agreement
	3	70	100.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	-
	4	112	100.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	-
Proficiency level	Intermediate (B1)	69	86.2	11	13.8	0	0.0	Agreement

	Upper-Intermediate (B2)	100	100.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	-
	Advanced (C1)	80	100.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	-
	Near Native	40	100.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	-
Experience Level	No experience	69	86.2	11	13.8	0	0.0	Agreement
	Some experience	170	100.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	-
	Extensive experience	50	100.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	-
Verb form	Plural (sent. 2,4,6,7,8)	141	94.0	NA		9	6.0	Agreement
	Singular (sent. 1,3,5,9,10)	148	99.0	NA		2	1.0	Agreement

Table 4. Translation accuracy of English collective nouns distributions by academic level, English proficiency, experience, and verb form

According to Table (4), proportions are presented descriptively. The accuracy rates improved consistently as the academic level improved (years 1 to 2: 90% correct; years 3 to 4: 100% correct). There was also a similar accuracy of 86.2% of students who had no translation experience versus 100% of students who had some or extensive experience. Agreement errors increased to 6% when the English source used plural verbs and only to 1% with singular verbs.

4.1 Student Translations

Ten English sentences with collective nouns were translated by each participant and their responses were classified as accurate, partially accurate and inaccurate. The overall performance of students in terms of the comprehension of the collective noun meaning proved to be good; however, some patterns were observed in grammatical agreement and lexical choices. In general, most translations were accurate or close to accurate with some errors regarding grammatical concord (where the verb does not properly agree with its subject), notional agreement (treating the group as if it were several individuals), or overly literal lexical choice. The following subsections discuss the problematic sentences produced from students' translations:

4.1.1 Sentence (2): *committee as plural*

Even though the English verb was plural (i.e., have agreed), most students rendered the translation for *committee* back into a singular feminine collective noun. For instance, check 10 below:

وافقت	اللجنة	على	الشروط	المشروطة
wafaqat	al-lajna	ala	al-shurut	al-mashruta
agreed	the committee	to	the conditional	conditions

(10) *The committee have agreed on the conditional terms.*

On the one hand, اللجنة *al-lajna* ‘the committee’ is treated as a singular feminine collective noun, and وافقت *wafaqat* ‘agreed’ is a feminine singular verb, which is grammatically correct in Arabic. This proves that students generally maintained grammatical concord with the Arabic syntax rather than pluralizing the verb.

A couple of students used a restructured subject to make the plurality explicit. For instance, check 11 below:

اتفق	أعضاء	اللجنة	على	الشروط
ittafaqa	a'daa	al-lajna	ala	al-shurut
agreed	Members	committee	to	the conditions

(11) *The committee have agreed on the conditional terms.*

This translation of the collective noun *committee* would conceptualize it as not just one entity but a group of people, which is semantically correct. However, the infrequency of the plural/notional translation suggests that most students preferred to view the committee as a single entity.

An incorrect attempt to mimic the English plural structure was when one participant used a plural verb وافقوا *wafaqu* ‘they agreed’ with اللجنة *al-lajna* ‘committee’ as the subject, which is a singular feminine collective noun, creating an ungrammatical construction (effectively inserting an unnecessary ‘they’). This error is caused by the failure to apply grammatical concord in Arabic when translating English plural verbs literally.

4.1.2 Sentence (4): jury used with plural verb

A challenging collective noun to translate was *jury*, which was plural in the English sentence when followed with a plural verb (*are debating*), meaning the group is behaving as individuals. The Arabic word for *jury* is هيئة المحلفين *hay'at al-muhallifin*, which literally means ‘panel of jurors’ and is treated as a singular feminine collective noun because هيئة *hay'at* ‘panel/board’ is singular. Check 12 for example below:

لا تزال	هيئة	المحلفين	تناقش	الحكم
la tazal	hay'at	al-muhallifin	tunaqish	al-hukm
still	Panel	the jurors	debates	the verdict

(12) *The jury are still debating the verdict.*

More than half of the participants used the verb تناقش *tunaqish* ‘debate’, which is feminine singular to agree with هيئة *hay'at* ‘panel’, which is treated as a feminine singular as well. The participants translated the sentence with accurate responses where they maintained grammatical concord by treating *jury* as one unit in Arabic.

However, less than half the participants took a notional agreement approach, using *members of the jury*. For example, check 13 below:

ما يزال	أعضاء	هيئة	المحلفين	يناقشون	الحكم
ma yazal	a'daa	hay'at	al-muhallifin	yunaqishun	al-hukm
still	members	panel	the jury	debate	the verdict

(13) *The jury are still debating the verdict.*

Three participants demonstrated grammatical errors by overextending the plural notion. They used a plural verb with هيئة المحلفين *hay'at al-muhallifin* 'panel of jurors' without rephrasing the subject resulting in ungrammatical constructs. For example, check 14 below:

يناقشون	هيئة	المحلفين	الحكم
yunaqishun	hay'at	al-muhallifin	al-hukm
debate	panel	the jury	the verdict

(14) *The jury are still debating the verdict.*

The use of يناقشون *yunaqishun* 'they debate', which is a 3rd person masculine plural verb, expresses an implied plural subject 'they', whereas هيئة المحلفين *hay'at al-muhallifin* 'panel of jurors' (feminine singular) is rendered as the object and not the subject as referred to in the source text owing to the lack of agreement between the verb يناقشون *yunaqishun* 'they debate' (3rd person plural verb) and the noun هيئة المحلفين *hay'at al-muhallifin* 'panel of jurors' (feminine singular). This places both هيئة المحلفين *hay'at al-muhallifin* 'panel of jurors' and الحكم *al-hukm* 'the verdict' in an object position, which either gives rise to an ungrammatical two-object construction *they debate the jury the verdict* or a missing preposition such as مع *ma* 'with' as in *they debate with the jury the verdict*. Hence the use of يناقشون *yunaqishun* 'they debate' in example (14) above ruins the sentence's structure and shows confusion in agreement.

In Modern Standard Arabic, syntax marks the grammatical relations morphologically with via case endings and verb inflection, whereas the word order of verbal clauses is unmarked as VSO (Ryding 2005: 63–65). The subject comes after the verb, bearing a nominative mark, and the object follows the verb and marked as accusative. However, in colloquial forms of Arabic such as Palestinian Arabic, case markings disappear, and syntactic roles are often determined by word order and context instead of overt inflection (Ryding 2005: 166–167). Therefore, in the translation above هيئة المحلفين *hay'at al-muhallifin* 'panel of jurors' comes after the verb and is not marked morphologically with a case, thus being syntactically considered as an object, whereas the verb يناقشون *yunaqishun* 'they debate' is considered as a plural subject.

4.1.3 Sentence (6): police as plural

The equivalent term for the collective noun *police* (as a force or an institution) in Arabic is الشرطة *al-shurta* 'the police'. In this case, الشرطة *al-shurta* 'the police' is treated as a singular feminine noun in Arabic and the verb تفحص *tafhas* 'examines' that follows the noun accordingly is treated as singular feminine. For example, check 15 below:

تفحص	الشرطة	مسرح	الجريمة
tafhas	al-shurta	masrah	al-jarima
examines	the police	scene	the crime

(15) *The police are examining the crime scene.*

In Arabic, this direct translation is a correct and natural translation and shows that students simply defaulted to grammatical concord by treating the police as a single entity.

Interestingly enough, one student made an explicit plural reference by using *members of the police*. For example, check 16 below:

يعاين yu'ayin inspect	رجال rijal men	الشرطة al-shurta the police	مسرح masrah scene	الجريمة al-jarima the crime
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(16) The police are examining the crime scene.

The collective noun *police* is rendered as رجال الشرطة *rijal al-shurta* ‘police men’, which is a plural subject and a valid notional translation focusing on the individuals. This rendering was still a valid choice, producing a correct result, and was accurate.

4.1.4 Sentence (7): crowd with plural verb

Crowd is an English collective noun taking the plural verb *were cheering* which stresses the crowd being made up of parts acting together. In Arabic, the noun *crowd* is treated as singular masculine. The participants rendered the collective noun الحشد *al-hashd* ‘crowd’ as singular masculine as well as the verb that followed. All translations maintained grammatical concord. For example, check 17 below:

كان kan was	الجمهور al-jumhur the crowd	يهتف yahtif cheer	ب bi in	صوت sawt voice	عال a'li loud	في fi in	الساحة al-saha the arena
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(17) The crowd were cheering loudly at the arena.

However, three participants used the plural verb كانوا يهتفون *kanu yahtifuoun* ‘they were cheering’ along with the singular masculine collective noun الحشد *al-hashd* ‘the crowd’. This is ungrammatical in standard Arabic, where the correct structure should be كان الحشد يهتف *kan al-hashd yahtif* ‘the crowd was cheering’. This error was most likely due to the literal rendering of ‘were’, which required a plural verb form, resulting in English structure rather than Arabic rules.

4.1.5 Sentence (8): staff with plural verb

The term *staff* is a collective noun in English and is usually followed by a plural verb to refer to a group of employees. However, in Arabic, the singular counterpart of the word *staff* does not exist. Therefore, translators usually opt for the plural term الموظفون *al-muwazzafun* ‘the employees’. Almost every participant translated *the staff* as a plural noun. For example, check 18 below:

وافق wafaq accepted	الموظفون al-muwazzafun the employees	على ala on	الشروط al-shurut the terms	الجديدة al-jadida the new	ل li to	الشركة al-shareka the company
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(18) The staff have accepted the new terms of the firm.

The noun الموظفون *al-muwazzafun* ‘the employees’ is inherently plural and the verb وافق *wafaq* ‘agreed with’ is in the masculine singular form. This is due to the nature of Arabic grammatical structure (verb-subject-object) VSO, where the verb typically appears in a singular form whether the subject is singular or plural.

Due to flexibility in Arabic, we can use the (Subject-verb-object) SVO order in which if the sentence starts with the subject الموظفون *al-muwazafun* ‘the employees’, then the verb that follows should be وافقوا *wafaqu* ‘they agreed’ and not vice versa. In Arabic, according to Fischer (2002: 187–188), this asymmetry is a conventional characteristic of Modern Standard Arabic grammar, highlighting that if the subject as a noun follows the verb, then the verb is usually in the singular, even if the noun is plural, however, if the noun precedes the verb, then the verb should agree with it in number. This was apparent in the case of three participants’ translations.

Only one participant proposed rendering the staff into الطاقم *al-taqam* ‘the staff/crew’ as a collective singular. Though this is not a typical phrasing for this situation amongst office staff in Modern Standard Arabic, it still makes sense and is grammatically correct because the noun الطاقم *al-taqam* ‘the staff/crew’ is singular masculine, while وافق *wafaq* ‘agreed’ is a singular masculine verb that preceded the noun.

Overall, the sentence reflects that participants can convert a collective noun to an explicit plural when appropriate in Arabic, although a few participants had difficulties with plural verb agreement.

4.1.6 Sentence (10): jury with singular verb

Generally, this sentence was well translated by nearly all the participants using an Arabic passive or impersonal constructions. For example, check 19 below:

تم	اختيار	هيئة	المحلفين	ل	المحاكمة
Tam	ikhtiyar	hay’at	al-muhallifin	li	al-muhakama
has been done	the selection of	panel	the jury	for	the trial

(19) *The jury has been selected for the trial.*

Literally, it would be rendered as *the selection of the jury has been done for the trial*. The construction with تم *tam* ‘has been done’ plus verbal noun, as in the English passive, underscores the completion of the action but without an agent. It appeared in many responses and was uniformly marked as accurate.

In teaching English passives, the passive structure تم *tam* ‘has been’ is one of the most common translation approaches and the participants used it correctly. It is also worth noting that the collective noun was rendered correctly as a single entity indicating a group of individuals.

5 Discussion of the findings

5.1 Approaches to Translating English Collective Nouns

Through the analysis of student translations, it is shown that there are observable trends for how Palestinian translation students translated English collective nouns into Arabic. The participants translated the English collective nouns by employing an equivalent singular noun in Arabic together with corresponding singular verb agreement, which is the standard Arabic grammatical concord. This concurs with the fact that Arabic collective nouns are generally handled as singular entities (Dror 2016: 305; Igaab & Altai 2017: 293–294). For instance, the

sentence *The government is preparing new political reforms* was normally translated as “تستعد الحكومة لإصلاحات سياسية جديدة” which translates back as ‘the government is preparing new political reforms’, rendering الحكومة *al-hukuma* ‘the government’ as a singular feminine noun with a singular feminine verb تستعد *tasta’ed* ‘is preparing’. Likewise, sentence five follows the same trend. Based on the participants’ translations, they mainly followed the Arabic norms, matching de Vries’ claim (2021: 267) regarding the treatment of English collective nouns as singular entities. The tendency shows a grammatical concord in the target language where the Arabic grammar rules require a singular agreement for such nouns. Correspondingly, most of the participants applied this rule for collective nouns used with singular verbs in English (e.g., *team is*, *government is*, *committee has*).

Nevertheless, in the case of English collective nouns used with plural verbs to signify notional plurality, a notable variation was found. Some participants kept the default form in Arabic (i.e., the singular) adhering to grammatical concord in Arabic, while others tried to be more explicit in conveying the plural notion. In the case of sentence (2) *The committee have agreed on the conditional terms*, where *committee* is notionally plural in English, approximately half of the participants translated it as ... وافقت اللجنة على الشروط... *wafaqat al-lajna ala al-shurut...* ‘the committee agreed on the terms’, with اللجنة *al-lajna* ‘the committee’ as a singular subject taking a singular verb وافقت *wafaqat* ‘agreed with’. The idea of this choice is that in Arabic *the committee* is treated as a single unit, mirroring Arabic grammar conventions. However, the other half of the participants changed the subject into a plural noun phrase to make the meaning of the plural more salient by introducing أعضاء اللجنة *a'daa al-lajna* ‘the members of the committee’ with a plural verb, as in ... أعضاء اللجنة وافقوا على الشروط... *a'daa al-lajna wafaqu ala al-shurut...* ‘the members of the committee (they) agreed on the terms...’.

The same observation can be made for sentence (4) *The jury are still debating the verdict*. Some wrote هيئة المحلفين يناقش الحكم لا تزال *la tazal hay'at al-muhallifin tunaqish al-hukm* ‘the panel of jurors is still debating the verdict,’ keeping هيئة المحلفين *hay'at al-muhallifin* ‘the jury’ as a singular, collective *panel*. Others wrote لا يزال أعضاء هيئة المحلفين يناقشون الحكم *ma yazal a'daa hay'at al-muhallifin yunaqishun al-hukm* ‘the members of the jury are still debating the verdict,’ explicitly using أعضاء *a'daa* ‘members’ and a plural verb. This indicates the participants’ divergence in their approaches to agreement where some translations kept the Arabic grammatical singular form, and others used the English notion of plurality. According to Quirk et al. (1985: 758), the phenomenon of notional concord is that English collective nouns can take a plural verb agreement. This phenomenon in translation was something the participants had to navigate. Those who left اللجنة *al-lajna* ‘the jury’ or هيئة المحلفين *hay'at al-muhallifin* ‘the panel of jurors’ singular in Arabic were focusing on Arabic grammatical concord, and those who inserted أعضاء *a'daa* ‘members’ were attempting to convey the same plurality in notion that was expressed in English, rather than preserving the singular grammatical form.

Arabic does not generally permit a grammatically singular noun to be directly followed by a plural verb form. In this case, the translation is required to use a singular verb or to rephrase the subject as plural. For example, when translating sentence (18) *The staff have accepted the new terms of the firm*, many participants avoided using a singular term for *staff* and instead translated it as الموظفين وافقوا على الشروط الجديدة للشركة *al-muwazafun wafaqu ala al-shurut aljadeeda li al-alshareka* ‘the employees (they) agreed to the company’s new terms’, using a plural noun الموظفين *al-muwazzafun* ‘the employees’ with a plural verb وافقوا *wafaqu* ‘they agreed’. When referring to staff, it was understood as several people (employees), so the Arabic translation employs a plural form of the word. However, one participant rendered *the staff* by

using a single collective noun, such as الطاقم *al-taqim* ‘the staff’, indicating a singular noun and followed by the singular verb وافق *wafaq* ‘agreed’, but this translation seemed slightly less natural than the one using الموظفون *al-muwazafun* ‘the employees’ in formal Arabic. Nevertheless, one approach favours clarity by lexical adaptation ‘employees’, the other keeps a more literal collective noun.

Additionally, sentence (6) *The police are examining the crime scene* is rendered by most participants as تفحص الشرطة مسرح الجريمة *tafhas al-shurta masrah al-jarima* ‘the police examines the crime scene’, treating الشرطة *al-shurta* ‘the police’ as a singular collective paired with a singular feminine verb تفحص *tafhas* ‘examines’. The Arabic word الشرطة *al-shurta* ‘the police’ is a collective noun grammatically treated as singular (feminine), therefore the participants’ translations follow Arabic rules. One participant rendered *the police* as رجال الشرطة *rijal al-shurta* ‘police men’ with an explicit plural reference. Once more, it is a matter of whether the translator considered this plurality of individuals important enough to emphasize.

On the whole, the participants’ approaches to the task indicate that English and Arabic differ in dealing with collective references. Even in the literal strategy, participants frequently still formed a correct Arabic sentence as Arabic would normally use the singular form for the group. The notional approach was used by a few participants to preserve the nuance of English plurality, which is correct if the translator used the correct Arabic grammatical structure.

Generally, Palestinian translation students use the standard singular collective forms in Arabic when translating English collective nouns. Also, a notable number of the students demonstrate knowledge of meaning differences associated with plurality in the source text. Some students adjust their Arabic phrasing (e.g., adding ‘members’ or choosing a plural noun) to reflect the meaning of English collective nouns treated as plural (e.g., using ‘have’ or ‘are’). In such scenarios, both grammatical and notional agreement occur simultaneously in which the subject is grammatically plural in Arabic but also reflects the emphasis on individual members as conveyed in the source text. Thus, the strategies used by students range from the use of grammatical concord (stay with Arabic’s default singular agreement of the collective noun) to the restructuring of the sentence indicating plurality as the notional concord in English implies. Based on the observations made by Lyons (1977: 315) and Quirk et al. (1985: 316) about collective nouns, the choice to regard the collective as a single entity or a collection of individuals is related to the context.

5.2 Difficulties in Translating Collective Nouns

Key challenges in translating some collective nouns from English into Arabic based on the point of view of participants are presented in Table (5) below:

Theme	Summary of students’ responses)	%
difficult collective nouns to translate	The challenging collective nouns to translate were both <i>jury</i> and <i>committee</i> . <i>Staff</i> was also mentioned multiple times.	80%
Trouble between singular vs. plural agreement	Around three quarters explicitly indicated that Sentences (2) and (4) (<i>committee/jury</i> with plural verbs) were confusing.	75%
Literal translation sounding unnatural	Almost everyone said that sentence (4) “jury are debating” could not be literally translated and that they needed to rephrase.	70%+

Translation choice (singular vs. plural)	The majority of students reported using singular forms.	65%
Reliance on grammatical agreement or meaning	The majority said they relied more on grammatical agreement rather than blindly applying meaning.	70% grammar
Awareness of English collective-noun flexibility	About half replied “Yes, quite conscious”; about 40% replied “No, this was the first time” and “Somewhat”.	50% aware / 40% new / 10% partly aware
Journalistic/political text preferred strategy	Nearly everyone said flexibility can be used based on contexts.	85%
Flexibility of agreement in Arabic	Approximately 60% were in favour of rendering collective nouns in the singular form and also allowing plural when the meaning demands it.	60% flexible

Table 5. A thematic summary of students' reflective responses

Several key challenges are identified through the performance data as well as the analysis of the participants' own reflections analysis in Table (5) from the follow-up questions in the survey. Many participants specifically noted that singular vs. plural agreement confusion is the foremost amongst these challenges. Participants often had difficulties deciding whether to maintain a collective noun for singular in Arabic, or somehow use plurality, especially when it was the source in English with a plural verb. This reinforces the findings observed by Al-Tameemi and Farhan (2019: 610) in a broader context when they stated that translators generally face some issues regarding grammatical concord when translating from English into Arabic when it comes to deciding whether to use singular or plural agreement in the target language.

This challenge was evident with collective nouns such as *committee* and *jury*, and was confusing to several students who noticed the collective nouns paired with plural verbs. Thus, the participants wondered whether to treat the words as singular or plural in Arabic. For example, one participant remarked that the word *committee* was used with *has* in some cases and with *have* in others, which confused him. Another participant admitted having some trouble with the collective noun *jury*, especially when the English sentence contained a plural verb form, so he had to choose whether to maintain it as singular in Arabic or use additional words to indicate plurality. Such uncertainties caused by notional agreement in English to indicate plurality were underscored by the fact that in Arabic, indicating plurality explicitly often requires restructuring the subject into a grammatically plural form. When translators decide on this restructuring, grammatical and notional agreement coincide; when they do not restructure, they stick to the singular collective form and are guided by the concord rules in Arabic. Whichever the case, Arabic demands a balance between the *semantic* presentation of quantity and the syntactic style allowed by its grammar.

The singular/plural challenge caused a few errors or awkward formulations by less experienced translators. A common error was the literal translation of a verb that broke the rule of Arabic grammar (i.e., using a plural verb with a singular Arabic subject). A few participants translated *the committee have agreed on the terms* as وافقوا اللجنة على الشروط *wafaqu al-lajna ala al-shurut* ‘the committee (they agreed) on the terms’. Here, the Arabic collective noun اللجنة *al-lajna* ‘the committee’ is singular here, but وافقوا *wafaqu* ‘they agreed’ is a plural verb form, leading to an ungrammatical construction in Arabic. This mistake was probably made because

the participants translated the English syntax literally without considering how Arabic rules function. This reflects exactly the type of problem observed by Al-Tameemi and Farhan (2019: 609–610), who observed in their study that structural variation can lead students to default to Arabic singular even when the communicative context calls for explicit plurality, or to misapply plural agreement in an inappropriate context which conflicts with Arabic grammar. Such cases underscore why learning concord is of importance to avoid mistakes.

Another difficulty is avoiding the literal translation which may be grammatically correct but sound awkward in Arabic. In short, participants had to make sure that the Arabic phrasing was right for the target context and style. The word *jury*, then, was to be treated with care because it was a collective noun. For example, the Arabic equivalent of the English collective noun *jury* is not a single word because it is rendered as هيئة المحلفين *hay'at al-muhallifin* 'panel of jurors'. Some participants admitted they have found *jury* hard to translate because "it needed a full phrase." One participant with no knowledge of the term improvised with the phrase لجنة القضاة *lajnat al-quda* 'committee of judges', which is not a proper translation contextually. This issue of lexical gap causes difficulty where some English collective nouns having no one-word equivalent in Arabic are translated with descriptive phrases.

5.3 The Influence of Various Factors on Performance

The data analysis explored the relationship between the participants' level of academic study and their translation performance by considering previous translation experience, verb form of the English source, and the accuracy of rendering collective nouns. First and second year students produced 10% partially correct answers, primarily because of mismatched agreement, which was often the result of literal translation based upon English syntax (e.g., اللجنة وافقوا *al-lajna wafaqu* 'the committee (they) agreed', which is ungrammatical in Arabic. Whereas third and fourth year students responded with almost perfect responses. This result indicates that academic development decreases lexical and structural errors in translating collective nouns.

The same tendency could be noticed concerning proficiency and experience. In regard to English proficiency, at B1 level, the percentage of partially correct responses was 13.8%, but at the B2, C1, and C2 levels, all translations were correct. Likewise, students who had extensive or some translation experience performed better than those who did not have any translation experience, which validates the role of practice in the acquisition of sensitivity to structural differences between English and Arabic.

As for the verb form, which was a conclusive factor, almost all sentences with singular verbs were translated with all correct agreements with a percentage of 99%. On the other hand, sentences that used plural verb forms were the ones that contributed most to agreement errors with a percentage of 6%. This confirms previous results that English notional concord presents ongoing challenges to Arabic speaking students, considering that Arabic has a stricter concord system. Combined, these results suggest that proficiency, previous translation experience, grammatical cues, and academic training have an overall effect on student performance.

As for Arabic usage itself, Dror (2016: 316–317) observed that conceptual and structural differences between English and Arabic usages of collective nouns such as *al-jaysh* 'army' and *al-sha'b* 'people' pose difficulties for readers to understand. While progressing academically, students' syntactic awareness enables them to either keep Arabic grammatical concord (e.g., وافقت اللجنة *wafaqat al-lajna* 'the committee agreed') or restructure syntactically to deal with

notional concord (e.g., أعضاء اللجنة وافقوا *adaa al-lajna wafaqu* ‘the members of the committee agreed’), thus avoiding ungrammatical formations.

Previous studies have either investigated translation performance with English collective nouns (Al-Tameemi & Farhan 2019) or explored structural contrasts of English–Arabic concord (Igaab & Altai 2017) without addressing the issue of variation between different proficiency levels of learners. This study draws upon that research in three different aspects:

1. **Quantitative/qualitative mixed methods:** The study is a combination of a translations task that provides data measured in terms of accuracy and reflective responses concerning the decision-making process underlying each translation. This dual procedure yields more information about the performance results as well as the strategies employed, unlike earlier studies on collective noun translation.
2. **Emphasis on proficiency level comparison:** The study includes participants across the four years of an academic translation programme. Upon that, the study gives a more developmental view on how syntactic awareness and strategy choice changes under the influence of training and experience. This allows to draw a more sophisticated insight into the relation between linguistic competence, training in translation and error decrease.
3. **Contextualized corpus:** The translation task is based on political and journalistic contexts related to Palestinian students whose linguistic environment involves regular exposure to such discourse in Arabic as well as English. This places the results in a very pertinent sociolinguistic and professional context.

Hence, this study contributes to the literature through its combination of methods, variety of participants, and relevancy of context, which gives a more precise representation of English–Arabic translation of collective nouns than other studies that only focus on the structure description or isolated error analysis. Although certain results of the current study (i.e., the overall tendency to preserve Arabic singular agreement) correlate with previous data in earlier studies, the present study goes beyond that, demonstrating how translators of different levels of training balance between grammatical concord and communicative emphasis of the source text.

5.4 Limitations

Even though the study is a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, certain limitations must be mentioned. First, the corpus is built only on the sentential level. This would be suitable to test grammatical concord, but larger discourse context may provide more evidence like pronoun reference and cohesion. Second, the sample consists of 30 students, which is a small proportion for a statistical comparison despite the diversity in level and experience. Third, the factors examined, i.e., proficiency, academic level and previous translation experience of the participants were all interrelated; therefore, it was not easy to see the individual effect of any particular factor on translation performance. For example, to determine if proficiency alone impact translation performance, future research needs to study groups that vary in proficiency but otherwise similar in other factors such as experience and academic level. Equally, it would be important to control the other factors in order to determine the impact of translation experience or academic training. Finally, To be able to authenticate the results of this study, future research might use larger corpora and more extended text contexts.

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Argumentum 21 (2025), 117–141

Debreceni Egyetemi Kiadó

DOI: 10.34103/ARGUMENTUM/2025/9

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Appendix

Questionnaire

“Translating Some English Collective Nouns into Arabic: A case Analysis of Palestinian Translation Students”

Introduction & Instructions

Thank you for taking part in this study! The goal of this questionnaire is to find out how English collective nouns are translated into Arabic and the hurdles which may be encountered by translation students in this process. The responses will improve our understanding in linguistic research in relation to the use of grammatical concord and translation strategies.

Instructions:

- Read each question carefully.
- Translate the sentences without using external sources.
- provide reasoning if multiple translations are possible.
- Answer all questions honestly and to the best of your ability.

Part 1 (Demographic Information)

Please select the appropriate option:

1. What is your age group?
 - 18–22
 - 23–27
 - 28+
2. What is your gender?
 - Male
 - Female
3. What is your academic level?
 - Year1
 - Year 2
 - Year 3
 - Year 4
4. How would you rate your English proficiency?
 - Intermediate (B1)
 - Upper-Intermediate (B2)
 - Advanced (C1)
 - Near-Native (C2)
5. What is your experience with translating journalistic texts?
 - No experience
 - Some experience (academic or personal practice)
 - Extensive experience (formal training, work, or professional tasks)

Part 2 (Translation task)

Instructions:

- Translate each sentence accurately into Arabic.
- Maintain grammatical correctness and meaning.
- If multiple translations are possible, provide an explanation.

Translate the following sentences into Arabic:

1. The committee has devised a new scheme.
2. The committee have agreed on the conditional terms
3. The government is preparing new political reforms.
4. The jury are still debating the verdict.
5. The family has travelled on a holiday to Malaysia.
6. The police are examining the crime scene.
7. The crowd were cheering loudly at the arena.
8. The staff have accepted the new terms of the firm.
9. The team is getting ready for the competition.
10. The jury has been selected for the trial.

Part 3 (Reflective Questions)

A. Difficulties faced in translation:

1. Which collective noun(s) in the task was difficult for you to translate? Why?
2. Did you have trouble between singular and plural agreement? If so, for which sentences?
3. Were there occasions where a literal translation would have sounded unnatural in Arabic? Provide an example.

B. Strategies used in translation:

1. How did you decide to translate a collective noun into singular or plural in Arabic?
2. Did you rely more on grammatical agreement or meaning (notional concord) in your translations? Explain your reasoning.
3. Would a different translation strategy be necessary for journalistic or political texts? Why or why not?

C. Understanding of collective noun concord (agreement)

1. Were you aware that English collective nouns can take singular and plural agreements before this task?
 - Yes, I was fully aware.
 - Somewhat.
 - No, this was new to me.
2. Do you think collective nouns should always remain singular in Arabic or are there terms for which there should be flexibility in agreement? Explain your reasoning.