

# Free Online Machine Translation Services as Providers of Gist Translation: A Fiction or a Reality\*

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## ABSTRACT

Free online machine translation service providers, like *Google Translate*, *World Lingo*, and *Bing Translator*, among others, claim that these services offer gist translation that helps users get a general idea about texts they want translated from languages they do not master. However, research conducted on the efficacy of the translation output produced by these services, especially for the language pair English-Arabic, reveals that the linguistic flaws prevalent in the translated output result in texts that are incomprehensible, and hence fail to fulfill the goal set by these service providers (Izwaini 2006; Abu-Al-Sh'ar and Zughoul 2009; Al-Hadithi 2009; Al-Dabbagh 2010). This paper tries to investigate how the users of *Google Translate* rate the quality of the English-Arabic translations carried out by this service. To conduct this study, a questionnaire was developed whereby 100 participants assess the effectiveness and adequacy of four different text-types translated from English into Arabic by *Google Translate*. The results of the questionnaire indicate that the majority of the respondents find the Arabic translations difficult to digest, and need extra processing effort if the users want to get a general idea about the information originally expressed in the source language. This result, which supports the findings reached by the linguistic research conducted in this area, suggests that unless the *Google Translate* Team takes these results into consideration, fulfilling the goal set by this service provider will be a far-fetched reality.

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