

Contemporary Arabic and English Idioms: Translating Difficulties and Strategies

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Abstract— Translation is prospering in Iraq in general and people have become more interested in translation due to the fact that Translation is a primary way of communication. Also, Translation has been a good business recently. Idioms are culturally specific and contain several cultural characteristics, translating idioms is difficult. The goal of this study is to have better understand the challenges faced by Translation Iraqi undergraduates while translating idioms. The researchers conducted a test to determine the problems and difficulties. 60 senior students from University of Mosul and Cihan University-Erbil in Iraq participated in the test most of them were females. The study concludes that incorrect translation resulted from lack of understanding the culture, the misuse of idioms dictionaries, and the lack of equivalence.

Keywords— Difficulties, Idioms, Strategies, Translation

I. INTRODUCTION

People can exchange knowledge by using translation, which is regarded as a crucial tool in this regard. However, translation is not always simple, especially when it comes to translating idioms and culturally specific expressions.

In order to render and convey the intended meaning, translation requires an understanding of both languages, both cultures, and the right strategies (Dweik & Thalji, 2016). Understanding one culture can open doors to understanding another, as language and culture are inseparable twins. Idioms are culturally specific and the a great percentage of them has a cultural connotation, which makes them strange and challenging to interpret (Howwar, 2013). Therefore, during inter-language translating, translators must be aware of the culture and meanings.

This study, which is taking place in Iraq, aims to ascertain the strategies and difficulties encountered by Translation Iraqi students when translating idioms and expressions that are culturally bound. "at least two words which cannot be understood literally and which functions as a unit semantically," according to Beekman and Callow (1974), cited in Al-Shawi (2013), p. 140, "idioms are considered to be a category of figurative expressions." Because idioms reflect culture and linguistic boundaries and facilitate communication, idioms are regarded as an essential component of any language's mastery and a prominent natural part of everyday discourse (Howwar, 2013, p. 1). However,

they present a significant challenge for translators. Translation theory and practice have progressed, but translating idiomatic and culturally bound expressions remains a significant difficulty for translators and foreign teachers and students (Howwar, 2013, p. 1). According to Hussein et al., connotations of an idiom are not the total of the particles. 2000, p. 26).

A translator must convey an idiom's meaning in addition to the meaning of the words that make it up. In order for idioms translation to be successful, it is crucial for the translator to be aware of the meaning of idioms, the challenges that may arise, and the best methods for translating idioms. According to Dweik & Thalji (2016), strategies in translation are vital as a result of their role to overcome challenges that may arise during the translation process. There is little research on the challenges of translating idiomatic and culturally bound expressions into the Arabic language as well as the strategies used to overcome these challenges. The importance of this study, as well as its results and potential repercussions, is anticipated to increase as a result of this. As a result, it is essential to discover methods and approaches that can assist translators and students in overcoming the challenges of translating idiomatic expressions. In the literature, two major issues that stand out have been frequently mentioned. First, there is no equivalence in the target language because different languages express meanings in different ways, like idioms, fixed and frozen expressions, and so on. As a result, it is extremely challenging to locate equivalents in the target language. Second, it may be challenging to translate idioms that have the same form but different meanings in two languages (Baker, 1992). Translating idioms becomes even more difficult when a translator begins a group of culturally bound expressions, (Adiel&Ahmed, 2016, p. 37). The fact that Arabic is a semitic language, which is quite different from English, which is an Indo-European language, could a factor of difficulty of translating idiomatic expressions. This could make it difficult to effectively convey meaning because Arabic is a semitic language. The translator will be able to recognize the implied meaning of idiomatic expressions if they have a solid foundation in both cultures and are aware of both the TL and the SL (Al-Shawi & Mahadi, 2012).

The study will investigate the challenges that Iraqi undergraduates faced in translating idioms into Arabic. Second, The study will determine the strategies they employ to overcome and manage such obstacles, as well as what could be done to assist students in overcoming such obstacles and

enhancing their ability to translate idiomatic expressions in particular.

The following inquiries are the focus of the study: In translating idioms, what are the obstacles confronting Translation Iraqi undergraduate? How did they deal with and respond to these challenges? What can be done to assist them in overcoming such challenges?

II. PROCEDURE FOR PAPER SUBMISSION

This section provides a theoretical foundation for the current research on topics like idiomaticity in Arabic and English, definitions, difficulties in translating idioms, strategies, reviews of previous research, and findings.

A. English Idioms

Cultural idiomaticity is a trait that is deeply ingrained in human languages but is unique to each language (Ajaaj & Mohammed, 2014). The appreciation of idiomaticity is essential to learning and mastering any language because it is regarded as a feature that is shared by all languages.

According to Aldahesh (2013), p. 23, the complexity of idiomatic expressions in terms of semantics, syntax, and pragmatics presents a significant obstacle for translators and learners. "an expression that functions as a single unit and whose meaning cannot be worked out from its separate parts" is the definition of an idiom (Richards & Schmidt, 2002, 246). For instance, the meaning of the phrase "it rains cats and dogs" has no bearing on the meaning of the phrase as a whole.

Furthermore, Barkema (1996) defines idioms as "lexicalized expressions with idiosyncratic meanings" (p.127). An idiom is defined by Larson (1984) as "a string of words whose meaning is different from the meaning conveyed by the individual words." Because their constituents are unable to predict their meaning, they are translated as non-literary (Ajaaj & Mohammed, 2014, page 1). Although most idioms are used interchangeably in written and spoken discourse, sixty to seventy percent are associated with spoken discourse, according to Maxos (2003). The most well-known idioms are: Idioms are essentially metaphors that are difficult to comprehend. Because the meaning is in their components rather than individual words, they should not be taken literally; Most of the time, their grammatical or syntactic form is fixed and cannot be changed; Additionally, they share the same cultural and informal meaning (Ghazala, 2003, p. 204). They are grouped in a variety of ways, such as by grammatical category or parts of speech, concepts or emotions depicted, image they convey, such as body parts and food idioms, and semantic category idioms can take the following forms: social formulas, slang, proverbs, allusions, similes, dead metaphors, and collocations are also included in Ghazala's (2003) classification. full and unadulterated idioms, semi-idioms, proverbs, common phrases and semi-proverbs, metaphorical catchphrases, and expressions Acquiring and translating idioms is a significant challenge for translators and foreign students because of a number of factors. Idioms and expressions associated with a particular culture are difficult to translate. Due to their centrality, idioms are difficult to

translate (Trosborg, 1997, p. 109). Larson says that idioms should be translated carefully, and translators should first figure out what the idioms mean before looking for an equivalent that can say everything. Translators should avoid literal or word-for-word translation of idioms, according to Newmark (1988, p. 125). Therefore, it is not necessary to translate idioms separately; Instead, translators should look for the actual meaning that the idiom is attempting to convey as well as the cultural connotation.

B. Arabic Idioms

Arabic is extraordinarily rich and complicated. Idioms are a big part of it, and they can be found in all of the Arab world's dialects, including modern standard Arabic and classical Arabic. Lexicographers did not have a specific term to describe this linguistic phenomenon, despite the fact that medieval Arabic dictionaries included a significant number of idioms with in-depth definitions.

The term "ta'beerat istelaheya" is now famous and well known to refer to idiomatic expressions, and recently, several Arabic dictionaries have introduced, the term "A dictionary of idioms in modern Arabic" Wafa Kamel (2007).

Although Gazalah (2003) says that idioms tend to be mostly informal, this might not be the case for all idioms. Idioms are used a lot in the Quran, which is considered by Arabs to be the highest form of Arabic. In his book "*verbal idioms of the Quran*", written in 1989, Mustansir Mir emphasizes that "verbal idioms are a significant component of the Quranic vocabulary" (p. 2). Some idioms can be found in the Hadith of the prophet Mohammed PBUH, which are regarded as a standard for determining the accuracy of language. For instance, when he stated that "the upper hand is better than the lower hand," he was implying that it is preferable to be a charitable giver as opposed to a habitual receiver of charity.

However, Arabic idioms share few characteristics with those of other languages. First and foremost, it is challenging to comprehend the idiom's meaning from its parts.

Second, the majority of Arabic idioms are metaphorical. For instance, the idiom, which literally translates to "يخضع جناحه" has the metaphorical meaning "be humble and kind." Additionally, the constituents of Arabic idioms cannot be substituted because they are structurally-fixed.

The verb "يخضع" cannot be changed for in the previous idiom. Additionally, Arabic idioms contain cultural and historical details that non-Arabic speakers cannot comprehend. For instance, "" (literally: "عاد بخفي حنين"). In conclusion, Arabic idioms cannot be translated literally, and the cultural aspects must be carefully considered.

Despite the fact that Arabic is a Semitic language, English idioms can often be found in it. Many Arabic idioms have the same meaning as their English counterparts, but their forms are different. For instance, the Arabic expression "" (literally: The English expression "to hit the nail on the head" can be translated as "يصيب كبد الحقيقة." In addition, some Arabic idioms possess the same meaning and form as their English counterparts. To give an example, the English expression "to swallow your tongue", which means to remain silent, has the same form and meaning as the Arabic expression "يلع لسانه". However, translators must be cautious because some idioms in the target TL may have very similar counterparts in the SL

that appear to be completely or partially different. The idiomatic expression "to eat your words," which means to admit that you were wrong about something, is an example of this. However, if a person "eats some letters or words" in some Arabic dialects, it indicates that they speak quickly or stutter, and as a result, some letters or words are uttered. The idiomatic question, "Has the cat got your tongue?" is another example. In English, it is to answer a question and speak when they don't want to. In French, a similar expression has a completely different meaning; *dormir sa langue au chat*, which means "to give one's tongue to the cat", refers to giving up, such as when solving a riddle. Because idioms have distinct collocational patterns, translators must take into account these superficially similar idioms with dissimilar meanings (Baker, 1991, pp. 79-80). In other words, finding a suitable equivalent that is similar in form and meaning or only in meaning is not an easy task and requires a thorough understanding of both languages and cultures. This issue will be discussed in detail in the following section.

C. Challenges in translating Idioms

Idioms present a challenge and foreign students alike. Translators frequently face numerous stylistic, cultural, and even religious obstacles when translating idioms from a language to another (Smadi, 2015, p. 124). According to Straksiene (2009), the lack of equivalence at the idiom level is one of the challenges that translators face when translating idioms. There are idioms in every language, but it's hard to find an equivalent in the TL that has the same meaning and form as the idiom in the SL. In the literature, a number of difficulties in translating idioms and the reasons for those difficulties have been identified. When translating idioms, translators may run into the following two interrelated issues: being able to understand and transfer an idiom on the one hand, and the ability to find the best equivalent in the target language on the other.

According to Baker (1991, pp. 80-85), the most difficult aspects of translating idioms are as follows: First, the TL might not have an equivalent for idiomatic expressions. Idioms are used to express a variety of meanings and concepts in different languages, which presents a significant challenge for translators. When translating from English to Arabic, it may be challenging due to the social and religious cultures' distinct languages (Al-Shawi & Mahadi, 2012, pp. 141-146).

As a result, inconsistency in the target language may present a challenge. Idioms and expressions bound by culture contain culturally specific elements that may not always translate into other languages. For instance, Arabic speakers cannot comprehend the expression "feels blue" because, unlike in American culture, the sadness or depression is never associated with blue. Second, idiomatic expressions are typically used in spoken discourse as a topic of style. However, languages like Arabic and Chinese avoid using idioms in written form, which is characterized with a high level of formality, and they make a clear differentiation between spoken and written when using idioms. According to Baker (1991, p. 84), this kind of difference in language and its use of idiomatic expressions could be a problem for translators. Many studies have looked into the challenges students face when translating idioms.

In this regard, numerous findings were reported, including the inability to accurately translate English idioms due to a lack of idiomatic and pragmatic competence; negative appropriation from Arabic; the omission of some meaning; illegibility when literal translation is used; misunderstanding of the sentence's meaning; students' ignorance of idioms; Idioms are unfamiliar to students; wide interpretations; ignorance of translation strategy; limited comprehension of unfamiliar idioms (Hussien et al.) 2000; 2002, Bataineh and Bataineh; 2007 by al-Hassan; 2008, Badawi; Kohil 2009; Memaz 2009).

Baker (1992) defined translating idioms strategy as "... a way of picking a similar-meaning idiom with a similar form in the TL may seem to offer the ideal solution, but that is not necessarily always the case". Translation strategy is defined by Loescher (1991, p.8) as "a potentially conscious procedure for solving a problem faced in translating a text, or any segment of it." These strategies are used in translating idiomatic expressions as well as expressions that Translators can use four main approaches to translate expressions that are idiomatic or culturally bound, according to Baker (1991). These methods are: utilizing an idiom with a meaning and form that are comparable (total equivalence); utilizing an expression that has a different form but a similar meaning (partial equivalence); translation through omission and paraphrasing (pp. 85-93). When the source and target languages belong to the same family and share cultural similarities, the first strategy, total equivalence in form and meaning, can only be achieved at certain times. However, there are a few English idiomatic expressions that have an equivalent in contemporary Arabic, and their meaning and form are clear.

To shed crocodile tears, for instance, is regarded as a transparent idiom because its meaning and form are more closely related to one another. Regarding the second strategy, partial equivalence, this involves translating the SL expression into its equivalent in the target language idiom, which has a different form but the same meaning. In order for a translator to locate equivalent idioms in the target language (TL) that have a similar meaning and function, cultural background competence and awareness are crucial. For instance, to carry coal to Newcastle, these are considered to be partially equivalent because they differ in form but serve the same purpose and meaning *بيبع الماء في حارة السقاين*. Semi-transparent idioms can be translated using this method. In the case of paraphrasing, a brief explanation of the meaning behind the idiomatic expressions used in the source language (SL) was required. When the translator encounters idiomatic and culturally bound expressions in the source language (SL) that do not correspond to idiomatic expressions in the target language (TL), this is typically utilized. When a match cannot be found in the target language (TL) due to differences in stylistic preferences between the source and target languages, this method is the most common and widely used method for translating idioms. Let the cat out of the bag, *يفشي السر* for instance, is regarded as paraphrasing the idiom's meaning in the source language for its equivalent in the target language.

Additionally, translation by omission entails omitting the target text's idiom due to stylistic or difficult-to-translate meanings. Baker says that (1992, pp. 85-93), the target text's meaning could be altered elsewhere. Lastly, using translation

notes: When there is no close match between the SL and TL and the translator is unable to find an equivalent, this strategy is frequently utilized in the translation of religious texts. According to Eftekhari (2008, p. 5), "using 'notes' in translation as a translation strategy and procedure appears to be essential for foreign language readers to be able to benefit from the text as much as ST readers do." A lot of empirical and non-empirical research has been done to figure out how to translate culturally bound idioms and expressions, such as (New Mark, 1998; Gaber, 2005; Maxos 2003; Badawi, 2008; In 2009, Balfaqeeh; 2012, Ghasemi and Farahani; Al-Shawi and Mahdi in 2012; Shojaei, 2012). The vast majority of these studies dealt with strategies influenced by cultural norms in idioms, proverbs, and expressions.

III. METHOD

A. Procedures

A sample of 60 seniors from the Departments of Translation at University of Mosul and Cihan University-Erbil in Iraq was chosen at random. The students are all Iraqis, they have all been educated in the same way, and they have a lot in common. The majority of the students are females. Since elementary school, they have been studying English and Arabic. A translation test and a brief survey were the instruments used to collect the data.

B. Translation test

The researchers came up with the translation test to specifically test students' difficulties with idiomatic and culturally bound expressions, the strategies they used to deal with them, and what could be done to help them improve their translation skills and overcome such obstacles. Experts in translation validated the test, changing all ambiguous items and rewording some examples. There are four types of idiomatic expressions in the fourteen sentences that make up the test. The semantic classification of idioms suggested by Fernando and Flavell was followed by the researchers (1981). According to Leah (n.d.), the sentences were arranged in accordance with the four categories of idiomatic expressions: three transparent idioms, three semi-transparent idioms (having metaphorical sense), three semi-opaque idioms (in which the figurative meaning is not joined to the words of the idiom), and four opaque ones (the Students were tasked with translating these sentences and reporting on the challenges they encountered and the approaches they took to overcome them. The test's reliability was determined by testing it again to see if the time allotted for this particular test was sufficient and if the questions and instructions were clear. Five students who share the same characteristics as the participants were given the test. The translation lecturers administered the test, explained the study's purpose, and addressed all inquiries regarding the test's items and instructions. There are two sections to the questionnaire: In the translation test, students were asked to check off the strategies they used to translate idiomatic expressions from the first section, which includes a list of those strategies. In the second section, there are a few open-ended questions in which students are asked to describe the challenges they faced when translating idiomatic and

culturally bound expressions, as well as the reasons behind the use of one translation strategy over another and the strategies they used most frequently to deal with these challenges.

IV. FINDINGS

An overview of the study's findings and a discussion of them in light of other studies analyzed in the literature are provided in this section. Through data analysis, the researchers have gained valuable insight into the challenges Iraqi students faced when translating idioms and the translation strategies they used to overcome them.

The lack of equivalence, according to Baker (1992), is one of the most significant difficulties in translating idioms. However, this study's findings demonstrate that the translator's ability to locate an appropriate equivalent to English idioms is more difficult to translate than the lack of equivalence.

12 of the 14 English idioms that students were asked to translate were given Arabic equivalents, according to data analysis. The study demonstrates that many students were unable to recall Arabic idioms with similar meanings to those in English, making it difficult to find an appropriate equivalent. It has been discovered that translating opaque idioms is more difficult than translating any other type of idiom. None of the understudies endeavored to give a comparable to the colloquialism 'don't let the cat out of the bag's and just two out of the thirty understudies figured out how to give a comparable to 'die'; "butterflies in my stomach" had a suitable substitute found by three students; Moreover, only four students were successful in locating a comparable Arabic expression to translate "bury the hatchet." Although this inability to find a suitable equivalent is more common when translating opaque idioms, it can also occur when translating transparent idioms, which is one of the surprising findings. Although half of the respondents were able to accurately and succinctly translate the English proverb "you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours," none of them were able to find an appropriate translation. Those who attempted to provide an alternative mentioned the Arabic expression "واحدة بواحدة," which would be comparable to the English expression "tit for tat," but not to the aforementioned expression. This difficulty is brought on by a lack of knowledge of the mother tongue's linguistic structure, as there are numerous idioms in classical Arabic that all mean the same thing. "We need to learn Arabic idioms first in order to be able to translate English idioms," stated one of the students surveyed.

Paraphrasing the idiom's meaning was the most common translation strategy used by students to deal with this challenge, and it has been used more than 200 times. According to Baker (1992), paraphrasing is frequently used when translating idioms, this finding is consistent. Students translated all kinds of idioms using paraphrasing, but they used it significantly more to translate the meaning of opaque idioms. For a number of transparent, semi-transparent, and semi-opaque idioms, students were able to identify Arabic expressions that were analogous.

For instance, for the expression "do not beat around the bush," 24 out of 30 students provided an alternative with a different form but the same meaning, and 11 students managed to come

up with an equivalent for "break the ice." In addition, ten students were able to identify the appropriate translation of "The law of the jungle."

When translating opaque idioms, these findings clearly demonstrate that finding an appropriate equivalent is more challenging. As previously stated, paraphrasing is frequently utilized to address this issue.

However, the degree of its effectiveness varies from idiom to idiom. When students paraphrased the meaning of transparent, semi-transparent, and opaque idioms, they performed better than when translating opaque idioms, according to data analysis. Some students, for instance, interpreted the expression "butterflies in my stomach" as "abdominal pain" or "hunger," and others equated "kicking the bucket" with "anger." However, 29 out of 30 students were able to accurately translate the phrase "raining cats and dogs." Some of the students who were surveyed said that some idioms are very hard to understand due to their cultural specificity, which is why it was hard for them to accurately translate their meaning. Their responses are in line with Howwar's (2013) description of idioms as culturally bound and associated, making them peculiar and challenging to translate. Students have also translated by omission as a strategy when they encounter difficulties. When it is difficult to translate the meaning, this tactic is used. Despite the fact that this tactic was utilized 61 times, students who omitted the idiom or a portion of it were not always able to compensate for the idiom's meaning elsewhere, as some translators do (Baker, 1992). As a result, the translations were shortened and altered to lack the effect that the idiom had in the original language. It's possible that some students didn't include the idiom because they couldn't understand it. Their responses to the question about the difficulties they encountered support this. The majority of them stated that one of their obstacles was their inability to translate or even comprehend certain idioms.

In addition, this study provides a novel insight into idiom translation that has not received much attention in previous research. According to the findings of the data analysis, some English idioms may cause students to recall Arabic idioms that differ in form and meaning. More than ten times, students provided idioms with different meanings and forms that they incorrectly assumed were equivalent to English idioms. For instance, the phrase "scratch my back and I'll scratch yours" was translated as "واحدة بواحدة" which translates to "tit for tat." Some students may have misunderstood the meaning of some idioms because they relied on the context to understand them. Several students stated that they looked at the context to comprehend the idiom's meaning when asked about their strategies. However, in order to comprehend the meaning of some idioms, it is necessary to look beyond the context, which may or may not be helpful.

In addition, when students were unable to locate an appropriate substitute, they utilized literal translation as yet another strategy. Despite the many differences between Arabic and English, it was surprising that literal translation could sometimes convey the idiom's meaning. Howwar's (2013) claim that idioms can never be translated literally is not supported by this finding.

In point of fact, the expressions "flog a dead horse" and "you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours" did not result in

meaningless translations when translated literally. Even though the effect is different, the Arabic reader is still able to comprehend the meaning. However, in some instances, the literal translation was ineffective due to unintelligibility—for example, "break the ice," "it is raining cats and dogs," and "kick the bucket."

In conclusion, students encountered difficulties due to their inability to locate an appropriate equivalent, misinterpretation of the idiom's meaning, literal translation that fails to convey the meaning or omitting all or part of the idiom without compensating elsewhere. The most common approaches to overcoming these challenges are paraphrasing, literal translation, and translation by omission.

CONCLUSION

This study's findings raise a number of pedagogical questions. To begin, despite the fact that the context plays a crucial role in determining the meaning of idioms, relying solely on it can result in a misunderstanding. Several students incorrectly paraphrased the meaning of some idioms because they relied on context, as stated by some students. Additionally, it is not always difficult to provide a functional equivalent of many idioms, but teachers must make students aware that idioms are culturally bound. Students should also be aware that providing an idiom with a similar meaning and form can be more effective at conveying the message than paraphrasing, despite the fact that paraphrasing is an effective translation strategy. In this study, students relied on paraphrasing even when their native languages had equivalents. In addition, teachers shouldn't discourage students from using literal translation when there are no equivalents because it can sometimes convey the meaning of the idiom. Nevertheless, Arab students should assess whether the translation is understandable using their native language.

While a literal translation of "it rains cats and dogs" does result in unintelligibility, a literal translation of "scratch my back and I will scratch yours" does not. Lastly, despite the fact that omitting a portion of the idiom may be desirable in some instances, the meaning should be compensated elsewhere in the text to avoid mutilated and shortened translations. Given the findings, it may be suggested that undergraduate students be taught culture translation to learn about the cultural differences between languages, which could have a significant impact on translation. To begin, students should try to avoid paraphrasing as much as possible. This is only suggested when the target language does not have an equivalent.

Second, it's important to teach students how to effectively translate idiomatic expressions. Third, when translating idiomatic expressions, students ought to use specialized dictionaries rather than literal translations. Finally, culturally specific expressions and idioms ought to be taught as part of foreign language and translation instruction to help students become familiar with and comprehend their precise and varied meanings.

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