
Strategies for Translating Idioms and Proverbs from English into Arabic

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ABSTRACT

Translation is essential for promoting understanding of different genres and in different languages. As more and more information is published globally, the need for translating a wide range of document types has emerged, including books and movies, that often require that they are rendered to meet the linguistic needs of the target audience. While linguistic and grammatical translation might be easy, culturally bound items in the conversation impact the approaches used in translation, often causing various challenges in effectively rendering a source from one language to another. Proverbs and idiomatic expressions are essential to everyday communication but are culturally bound to Spatiotemporal conditions. Giving them a literal translation might distort the intended meaning, primarily due to the cultural differences between the source and target languages. The current analysis is of the translation techniques adopted in the work of George Orwell, *Animal Farm*, and *One Thousand and One English Proverbs Translated into Arabic* by Omar Jabak. Consequently, the proverbs and idiomatic expressions are challenging to translate due to their cultural nature. Baker's (2011) taxonomy indicates that translating proverbs and idioms has resulted in adopting various techniques, including translations by omitting parts of the expression, paraphrasing, and using similar phrases in the target language. Concerning the translation of proverbs, the current data set confirmed that there are only two most appropriate translation techniques. That is a literal translation and paraphrasing, distorting the proverb's meaning in the target language.

Introduction

In the currently globalized and culturally diverse world, translation is a vital tool that enables people all over the globe to share information, news, culture, literature, and science, among others. However, rendering effective translations is a complex task, especially when it comes to rendering culturally bound expressions, as the translators must be well-versed in the target language and culture and knowledgeable of the appropriate strategies for rendering and conveying the intended meaning. (Ali & Sayyed Al-Rushaidi, 2017). In most instances, language and culture are inseparable, and often to understand a language, one must understand the culture. Idiomatic expressions and proverbs are culture-bound, and in many instances, they have cultural associations; thus, when translating them, effective strategies must be applied to ensure that the translations are successful. Idioms and Idiomatic expressions relate to the natural part of language use. Langlotz (2006) indicates that idiomatic expressions are related to conventional multi-word units that are semantically opaque and structurally fixed. The definition is further reinforced

by Healey (1968), who termed them as a group of words whose meaning cannot be deduced from the meanings of the individual words. Idioms contradict the principles of compositionality that indicate that the meaning of its constituents can determine the meaning of a complex expression.

Ebrahimi (2020) states that proverbs carry themes related to women, professions and occupations, money, love, marriage, and education, among many other important themes that are important to life and often culturally bound. Similarly, proverbs relate to fixed expressions that are important in any language, considering they have meanings that depict and illustrate various elements of life and, in turn, make them critical in any language and people's speech. Barajas (2010) indicates that the formulas of proverbs are essential in understanding the social construction of their meaning, considering they are not made of a single word and have specific forms that distinguish them from other language segments. Hence, in translating proverbs, the translators must be aware of the formulas of the proverbs when translating them into their closest equivalence in the target language (TL), considering the proverbs have cultural aspects of the source language that might be lacking in the target culture.

Translating idioms and proverbs faces numerous challenges because they are culturally bound. The cultural elements of the idioms and proverbs make them challenging to translate. Assaqaf's (2019) study reports that translating proverbs from English to Arabic is challenging since the target language needs equivalents. A study on translating English into Arabic through machine translation reported that Google Translate experienced difficulties and obstacles when translating English to Arabic due to lexical issues (Al-thresher & Almaaytah, 2018). In this respect, the importance of human intervention in translation must be addressed due to the importance of cultural knowledge of both the source and target language. Baker (1992) indicates that the challenges encountered when translating idioms and fixed expressions include a need for TL equivalence due to the cultural nature of the idioms and target and the differences between the language in expressing meaning. The second challenge is the availability of the SL proverb or idiom in the TL; however, the context may differ and have a different connotation. Lastly, the convention of using idioms in written discourse, the context in which they can use, and their frequency may differ in the source and target languages. Thus, evaluating how idioms and proverbs are translated from English into Arabic is imperative.

Numerous techniques and approaches continue to be used to overcome the challenges of translations. Studies on translation indicate that various approaches are employed in translating idiomatic expressions. Assaqaf (2019) argues that the most used translation techniques are paraphrasing, corresponding target text idiomatic expressions, idioms of similar meaning but different forms, omissions, compensation, and literal translations. Studies by Kamal (2022) report that idiomatic expression can be translated using strategies such as paraphrasing, utilizing an idiom with the same meaning but different form using idioms with similar meaning and form, omission, modulation, clause, and loan words. The studies further back these assertions by Smadi & Alishan (2015) on the techniques used in translating English to Arabic by undergraduate students stating that the most used techniques include paraphrasing and literal translation. While these findings offer important insights into translation, evaluating the approaches used in translating English to Arabic is essential.

Theoretical framework

The current study will be founded on Nida's "functional equivalence" theory. The theory was developed by Eugene Nida and stemmed from his experience as a professional translator of the Bible (Nida, 1991). The theory adopts Chomsky's universal generative-transformational grammar and pragmatic perspective on meaning to have a scientific umbrella for his translation theory. The theory is the three-stage system of translation that operates on ST and TT together. The theory indicates that before translators perform any rendering function, they must first analyse the source language linguistically and understand its various

components. This implies that translators must delve deeply into the essential parts of the source language to come to terms with the intended meaning. This stage is followed by the second part, the transfer, which primarily involves transferring the intended meaning into the target language. The third and final part of the theory emphasizes separating the transferred meaning semantically and linguistically to produce the equivalent TT. The second aspect of Nida's translation theory is critical due to dynamic equivalence. Dynamic equivalence relates to realizing the complete naturalness of expressions (Nida & Taber, 1969, p. 12). This can always be realized by seeking the closest natural equivalent of the source language message. Considering that proverbs and idiomatic expressions are culturally bound, the theory is applicable as it requires that translators understand the source language and target language effectively before rendering a proverb or idiomatic expression.

The cultural theory of translation:

The theory was proposed by Basnet and Lefevere (1990) and Venuti (1995) (Halliday, 2001). The theory offers a paradigm shift to the theoretical and methodological shift in translation studies that gained recognition in the early nineties. It focuses on the interaction between translation and cultures, primarily on how cultures impact and contain translations and the more significant issues of context, history, and convention. The theoretical lens offers a shift of translation from the textual perspective to translation as a culture, emphasizing the importance of translating a text in its cultural context. The theory emphasizes the translator's awareness of the source language's lexical sets and semantics. Cultural knowledge is indispensable for translation as it enables the translators to appreciate which linguistic units have situations, and social-cultural context makes the translation possible. Besides, the theory shows that linguistic units can only partially be understood in isolation from the cultural phenomena they symbolize. Hence, the theory can be used to explain the impact of culture on translation. The current study relates to translating proverbs and idiomatic expressions from English with figurative symbols that differ from those of the Arabic culture.

The third theory is the interpretive theory, also known as the theory of sense. The theory was proposed by Danic and Marianne (Choi, 2003). The theory emphasizes the resemblance between utterances and their meaning (Lederer & Larché, 2014). Concerning translation involves the understanding of speech and rewording. The theory is founded on four anchors. First: the command of the target language, the understanding of the relevant world and background knowledge by the translator, and the command of interpreting techniques. The central premise of the interpretive theory is the re-expression of the meaning of the source text into another language. The concept of resemblance brings out the sameness in meaning. The theory allows translators to use an equivalent expression that captures the message as intended in the original language. The last theory is the relevance theory, as advanced by Sperber and Wilson (1986) and Gutt (1998). The relevance theory's main component includes the process in the human mind and contexts. The theory indicates that utterance comprehension is not just a mechanical decoding process but an intelligence activity that involves reasoning and imagination. The theory relies on two components. Effect and effort that are context dependent. The theory is relevant to the current study as attention is directed to the choice of words and meanings. It will help understand how appropriate translations are in the target language.

Methodology

The study shall adopt a qualitative descriptive research approach. The qualitative descriptive design is appropriate for the current study as the approach addresses the question of who, what, and where subjectively (Kim et al., 2017). The study design shall adopt the approaches and techniques used to translate idioms and proverbs from English to Arabic. The data for the current study will be extracted from *George Orwell's Animal farm* and *Omar Jabak's book entitled One thousand and one English proverbs translated into Arabic*. The novel was selectively chosen for analysis due to its popularity in English and Arabic-

speaking countries. Besides, the book is rich in proverbs, idiomatic expressions, and other figurative words, making it most appropriate for analysing how idioms are translated and rendered from one language to another. Initially, the book was written in English and has since been reproduced in various and different languages, including Arabic. *Animal Farm* by George Orwell was also deemed appropriate in the analysis as it intended to have a hidden meaning and was written opaquely to avoid political arrest. In this manner, figurate language, including proverbs and idioms, was commonplace in the book. The researcher will use two versions of the book, one in English and the other in Arabic. Similarly, the book entitled *One thousand and One English proverbs translated into Arabic* is crucial as it represents the English-Arabic proverbs dictionary (Jabak, 2008). The proverbs in the book touch on various vital themes in life and thus were deemed appropriate for use in the analysis.

Data collection

The data will be collected from the book by carefully identifying different types of idioms and proverbs in English and Arabic. The English Idioms will be classified in line with Fernando's (1996) characterization, including pure idioms, semi-idioms, and literary idioms. The researcher will identify the various idioms and compare them against each other to determine how they were translated from the Source Language (SL) to the Target Language (TL). The researcher first identifies the English idioms and proverbs and compares them to the Arabic versions while also discussing the technique used in translating the given idiomatic expression. Each translation technique will be identified, and the way they will be evaluated to determine the efficiency of the translations with respect to semantic, lexical equivalence. Besides, the accuracy of the idioms will also be evaluated from the perspective of the source language's intended meaning and the rendered version. This will show the determination of the effectiveness of the translation from one language to another through maintaining the intended meaning of the translations. To ensure consistency and objectiveness of the analysis, the researcher will also be guided by Baker's (2011) strategies for translating idioms. The researcher will use translation quality assessment to evaluate samples from *One thousand and one English proverbs* by focusing on the most used strategies by the translator.

Table 1: Baker's (2011) Idiom translation strategies

A) Translating an idiom by using an idiom of similar meaning and form
B) translating an idiom by using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form
C) translating the idiom by borrowing the SL Idiom
D) Translation and idiom by paraphrase that refers to the most used way of translating an ST idiom that does not have a match in the TT
E) Translating an idiom by the omission of the entire idiom
F) Translating an Idiom by the omission of a part of the idiom
G) Translating an idiom by compensation. In this strategy, the ST idiom might either be omitted or played down at the point of its occurrence in the ST and brings it elsewhere in TT

To determine the accuracy and equivalence of the translation, the researcher shall adopt the use of Nida's (1964) model of equivalence, which includes two types formal and dynamic or functional equivalence. The formal equivalence emphasizes the message's form and content, translating every SL into its Matching word in the TL. The dynamic (functional) equivalence relates to translating the meaning of phrases or entire sentences. Nida's dynamic equivalence aims to create a natural and idiomatic target text emphasizing the TL culture.

Results and discussion

The following section outlines the translation techniques used in the translation of *Animal Farms* from English to Arabic. The first section of the analysis will focus on the translation of idioms in line with Baker's (2011) strategies:

a. Translating idioms by using an idiom similar in meaning and form

The technique involved translating the expression with a TT equivalent with respect to form and meaning. The approach emphasizes that the idioms in the translated language must be like the ones in the source language.

ST

The situation was quite *out of* their *control*.

TT

وُخْرِجَ الْمُؤَقَّفُ عَنْ سَيْطَرَتِهِمْ

Context of situation

The animals in *Animal Farm* could not endure the injustices inflicted upon them by Mr. Jones (the farm's owner) and his men, who did not bother feeding the animals. The animals were forced to storm into the store shed after breaching its door. Mr. Jones and his workers attempted everything they could to get the animals out of the storage shed, but they were unsuccessful. There is much envy in the world, especially in the United States and the world of males. Jones and his men were evicted from the farm after failing to handle the situation.

b. Translating an idiom by using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form

Baker (2011) describes the strategy as using an idiom in the target language that is similar in content to the SL phrase but differs in form. This method entails translating the idiom while keeping its semantic equivalency but not its lexical components.

ST

They had the entire song *by heart*.

TT

حَفِظُوا الْأَغْنِيَةَ بِرُمَّتِهَا عَنْ ظَهْرِ قَلْبٍ

Transliteration

Hafadhu al-ughniya birumatiha an (on) dhahri (back) qalb (heart).

In the translation, the meaning of the expression was conveyed effectively with an Arabic equivalent; however, they differ from the source language idioms as the expression includes three lexical components but implies the same meaning as memorization. Besides, looking from Nida's (1964) equivalence perspective, the translation can be considered functional.

c. Translation and idiom by paraphrase refer to the most used way of translating an ST idiom that does not have a match in the TT.

Baker (2011) defines paraphrasing as the most typical technique of translating an ST idiom that does not have a match in the TT. Because it is not always possible to discover a proper equivalence to an idiom, a translator must rely on the most prevalent approach in translation: paraphrasing.

ST

At heart, each of them was secretly wondering whether he could not somehow turn Jones "s misfortune to his own advantage.

TT

كَانَ كُلُّ وَاحِدٍ مِنْهُمْ يَتَسَاءَلُ فِي دَاخِلِهِ سِرًّا إِنْ كَانَ يَسْتَطِيعُ تَحْوِيلَ مُصِيبَةِ جُونَزٍ لِصَالِحِهِ

Transliteration

Kana kul wahid minhum yatasa" al fi (at) dakhilihi (heart) sirran in kana yastati" tahweel museebat jonez lisalihhi.

In the translation, the translator uses a paraphrasing strategy, as Baker (2011) advanced, by using a phrase with a similar form but a less natural meaning. Thus, in the translation, it is evident that culture influences translation by rendering the term that can be easily understood in the TT language.

d. Translating an idiom by the omission of the entire idiom

With respect to single words, it is common to overlook the entire idiom in the TL. Baker (2011) posits that in certain cases, such omission can take place as it cannot be used often. These instances include the lack of equivalent in the TL, challenges in paraphrasing or style-related reasons.

ST

At this, Snowball sprang to his feet and, shouting down to the sheep, who had begun bleating again, broke into a passionate appeal in favor of the windmill.

TT

وَعِنْدَ هَذَا هَبَّ سَنُوبُولُ وَاقْفًا وَصَاحَ فِي الْخِرَافِ الَّتِي رَاحَتْ تَتَغَوَّأُ مِنْ جَدِيدٍ، وَأَنْفَجَرَ مُنَاشِدًا بِشَكْلِ عَاطِفِي مَشْرُوعِ الطَّاحُونَةِ

Transliteration

Wa inda hatha habba Snowball waqifan wasaha fi al-khiraf allati rahat tathghoo min jadid, wa infajara munashidan bishaklin atifi mashru" al-tahunati.

In the target text, the translation eliminates the entire idiom applying Baker's (2011) approach of omission for stylistic reasons, even if the expression is equivalent in Arabic.

Translation of proverbs from English to Arabic

Proverbs translation

ST Meaning of proverb	TT	Strategy of translation
<i>Let the cobbler stick to his last.</i>	لَا تُغَيِّرْ عَمَلَكَ	Paraphrase
<i>Give a dog a bad name and hang him.</i>	إَعْطِ الْكَلْبَ إِسْمًا سَيِّئًا وَاعْدِمْنَاهُ. لَا تُصَاحِبِ الْأَحْمَقَ	Literal translation

<i>He that lies down with dogs must rise up with fleas.</i>	مَنْ يَنَامُ مَعَ الْكِلَابِ يَسْتَقِظُ وَفِيهِ بَرَعُوثٌ	Literal translation
<i>A burnt child dreads the fire.</i>	إِسْأَلِ الْمَجْرَبِ. الْوَلَدُ الَّذِي يَحْرِقُ يَدَيْهِ يَخَافُ مِنَ النَّارِ	Literal translation
<i>Don't meet trouble halfway.</i>	لَا تَجْلِبِ الْمَشَاكِلَ فِي مُنْتَصَفِ الطَّرِيقِ	Literal translation
<i>Gather ye rosebuds while ye may.</i>	إِغْتَنِمِ وَقْتَكَ	Paraphrase
<i>The Dutch have taken Holland.</i>	الْأَلْمَانُ احْتَلَوْا هُولَنْدَا. هَلْ تُصَدِّقُ ذَلِكَ؟	Paraphrase
<i>Better to do well than to say well.</i>	الْفِعْلُ خَيْرٌ مِنَ الْقَوْلِ الْحَسَنِ	Paraphrase
<i>Don't cross the bridges before you come to them.</i>	لَا تُسَوِّفْ	Paraphrase

The analysis confirmed that the two most common strategies to paraphrase proverbs from English to Arabic include paraphrase and literal translation. The analysis, however, identified various errors in the translation. When using literal translation, the findings confirmed that there were comprehension errors and morphological and grammatical errors. On the other hand, when using paraphrasing as a technique for rendering the translation, errors such as comprehension, omission, wrong lexical choice, and distorted meaning were the most common translation errors.

Conclusion

The analysis of the translation of proverbs and idioms from English to Arabic confirms that there are challenges that translators experience. Such challenges often impact the intended meaning of these expressions, resulting in the distortion of meaning, comprehension, and grammatical errors, among many others. The current analysis confirms that the most used techniques of translating idiomatic expressions include omission of the whole expression, paraphrasing the idiom, translating an idiom using an idiom of similar meaning and form, and translating an idiom by using an idiom of similar meaning but different form. The analysis also confirmed that some techniques are inappropriate in translating the idiomatic expression, such as the translations by omitting parts of the expression. Concerning the translation of proverbs, the current appropriate data set confirmed that there are only two most appropriate translation techniques. These include literal translation and paraphrasing, distorting the proverb's meaning in the target language. Moreover, the analysis confirmed that there is a need to further study the translation of proverbs in conversational context rather than in publication, as in the book *One thousand one English proverbs*. Such analysis will provide more insights into the influence of culture on translations.

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