Difficulties Faced by EFL Students in Translating Idiomatic Expressions From English into Arabic at University of Zawia

Mr. Kelani Suleiman Alkelani
A Lecturer at Department of English, University of Zawia

Abstract:

Translation is the process of rendering the meaning of the source text semantically, culturally, and grammatically into the target text. However, translating idiomatic expressions has been a challenge for students as it involves many cultural elements. This study aims to investigate the difficulties which encounter Libyan EFL students when they translate idiomatic expressions from English into Arabic and vice versa. It also attempts to know the students' skills in English language, particularly those who will become EFL teachers and translators. Moreover, the study endeavors to identify and demonstrate some of the strategies that are used by these students to translate and overcome such difficulties and suggest what could be done to help them handle such challenges and improve their translation skills and competencies. To collect the data of the study, fourteen EFL students studying at Department of English were given two English texts which include idiomatic expressions. Then the students were asked to translate these texts into Arabic. After that the students translations of the texts were collected for analysis. The results demonstrate that the students' level of English language is weak, and they need to improve their comprehension of the English texts, specifically the English idiomatic expressions, to be good translators. The study ends with recommendations and suggestions that might help students to handle the challenges they encounter in translation.

Keywords: Idiomatic Expression, cultural Elements, Strategies, Difficulties.

Mr. Kelani Suleiman Alkelani

Difficulties Faced by EFL Students in Translating Idiomatic Expressions رؤيا

ملخص الدراسة :

الترجمة هي عملية نقل معنى النص المراد ترجمته دلاليا و ثقافيا و نحويا من لغة الى اخرى . ومع ذلك فإن ترجمة التعبيرات الاصطلاحية تعتبر تحديا بالنسبة للطلاب لأنها تتضمن الكثير من المكونات الثقافية. هذا البحث يهدف الى التعرف على الصعوبات التي تواجه الطلبة الليبيين في ترجمة العبارات الاصطلاحية من اللغة الانجليزية الى اللغة العربية. اضافتا لذلك فهو يحاول ان يعرف مدى معرفة ومهارة الطلاب في استعمال اللغة الانجليزية وخصوصا هؤلاء الذين يدرسونها كا متخصصون فيها بحيث سيصبحون مدرسين و مترجمين. كذلك تحاول هذه الدراسة ان تلقي الضوء على بعض الاستراتيجيات التي يستعملها الطلبة في الترجمة و التغلب على مثل هذه الصعوبات وما عليهم ان يتبعوه لمساعدتهم في التعامل مع هذه التحديات والرفع من كفاءتهم وتطوير مهاراتهم في الترجمة. اعطى لأربعة عشر طالبا نصان باللغة الانجليزية يتضمنان عبارات اصطلاحية تجارية وطلب منهم ترجمتهما الى اللغة العربية. بعد ذلك جمعت النصوص التي ترجمها الطلبة الى اللغة العربية لمناقشتها وتحليلها. و قد بينت نتائج النقاش و التحليل ان الطلبة يعانون ضعف في اللغة الانجليزية و يحتاجون الى المزيد من الجهد لتطوير و تحسين قدراتهم وكفاءاتهم حتى يصيروا مترجمين جيدين. و قد ختم هذا البحث بنصح الطلاب لبذل المزيد من الجهد و المساعدة لإيجاد حلول لهذه الصعوبات .

1. Introduction:

Idiomatic expression is a term used in grammar and lexicology to refer to a sequence of words which are semantically and often syntactically restricted, so that they function as a single unit Crystal (1980). They are viewed as one class of figurative expressions that occur in all expressions which cannot be understood literally and which functions as a unit semantically (Beekman and Callow 1974). They are also considered "as part of mastering any language, and they are a prominent natural part of everyday discourse because they reflect cultural and linguistic boundaries and enabling communication between different cultures" (Hawwar, 2013, p.1). These idioms are cultural-bound expressions and most of them are related to culture, and this makes their comprehension and translation a major problem for EFL students Howwar (2013). Baker (1991) argued that the main challenges of translating idioms are related to two main fields: the capacity to identify and to translate an idiom appropriately, as well as the complications in translating several aspects of meaning that an idiom or a fixed expression carries into the target language. Mollanazar (2004) maintained that that the

first step in rendering idioms is to identify them. Thus, the pitfall for translators is to decipher the idioms accurately. Nida (1964:13) also clarified that "the role of translator is to facilitate the transfer of the message, meaning, and cultural elements from one language into another and create an equivalent response to the receivers."

Despite the development in the field of translation, translating idiomatic expressions is still considered as a serious challenge for translators as well as for EFL learners (Hawwar, 2013, p.1). Idioms are difficult to learn because they cannot be translated literally, and they do not mean what they say (Mcpartland, 1981). A translator has to convey the meaning of an idiom over and above the words that forming it. Translator's awareness of the idioms meaning and the translation strategies used for them are important and necessary. They usually enable translators and students to overcome the difficulties that might be encountered by when they translate such idioms.

Thus, finding equivalents to the idiomatic expressions is a hard task for students because they need competence in using these idioms (Baker, 1991; Newmark, 1988). As there are many differences between English and Arabic cultures, idiomatic expressions cannot be translated literally because their translation will be incorrect. Therefore, students should be aware of the correct meaning of these idiomatic expressions and know the intended meaning of these expressions. This indicates that translating English idiomatic expressions into Arabic is a demanding task for students.

It is necessary to find methods and strategies to assist students overcome such emerging problems and difficulties in translating idiomatic expressions. Baker (1991) mentioned two main prominent difficulties have been frequently in the translation. The first difficulty is that there is lack of idioms equivalents in the target language. The second one is that the existence of idioms which have similar form but different meaning in two languages might be a source of difficulty in translation. The difference between English and Arabic also could be one of the factors that contributes to the problems in translating

idiomatic expressions as Arabic is a Semitic language that is quite distant from English which is an-Indo-European language. This might hinder effective rendering of meaning. However, if the students have solid foundation in both cultures and languages they will be able to catch the implied meaning of idiomatic expressions. As translating idiomatic expressions is hard task for EFL students, the present study attempts to investigate the difficulties that encountered Libyan EFL students in translating texts that involve idiomatic expressions from English into Arabic at one of the Libyan universities. It also endeavors to identify the strategies that EFL students use to respond and handle such difficulties.

2. Methods:

Randomly, 14 fourth year students studying at the Department of English, University of Zawia were selected to participate in this study. All of them are Libyan. 7 of them were males and the rest are females. They have been studying English since their primary schooling. The tool which was used to collect the data foe this study was a translation test. This test was created by the researcher to specifically examine students' difficulties with idiomatic expressions and to identify the strategies that they used to handle these difficulties. The data which will be collected by this test might be helpful to improve their translation skills and competencies to overcome such challenges. The test consists of 2 texts which contain different types of idiomatic expressions. The texts were related to business translation. They carry metaphorical senses that could be not known by through literal meaning of the idioms. Students were asked to translate these texts and report the difficulties that they faced and strategies that they used to handle these difficulties. Three students' translation of the test texts were selected to be discussed . The test texts were administered by the translation teacher who explained the purpose of the study and responded to all the questions raised by the student participants regarding the test instructions and items.

3. Notes on Idiomatic Expressions

One of the major difficulty when translating English idioms into Arabic is not the lack of equivalence, but it is the linguistic ability that enables a student to find a suitable equivalent. The following idioms are some examples of English idioms and their literal translation into Arabic which were given to students who participate as samples of English idioms: (tall order) cannot be translated into Arabic as (امر طویل) but should be translated to (مهمة شاقة). (You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours), the literal translation into Arabic is (حك لي ظهري و احك لك ظهرك), but we should to understand the idiom from the context. If we understand the context, then we will get the correct meaning of the idiom. Thus, we should translate it as (كل و وكل). Another example is (Between the devil and the deep blue sea), its literal translation into Arabic is should be as (بين الشيطان و البحر الازرق العميق), but the suitable function meaning is (بين فكي كماشة). Another example, the idiom (forbidden fruit is sweet). The literal translation of this idiom in Arabic is (الفاكهة الممنوع حلوة), but the suitable function meaning is (كل ممنوع مرغوب). The previous examples show that literal translation lead to incorrect meaning. Therefore, students should have good controlling of both languages and cultures. Furthermore, they should have deep understanding and awareness of both languages and cultures. However, students without being erudite in both cultures they will find themselves render incorrect translation which is extremely difficult if not possible to understand.

4. Idiomatic Expressions Related to Business

The following are some idiomatic expressions which used in business. They show students that there are different idiomatic expressions which used in different fields. The idiom (to keep something under wraps), means to keep something secret, to not let anybody know about a new project or a plan. For example, I am sorry, I cannot tell you anything about the project I'm working on. My boss told me to keep it under wraps The idiom (to keep it under wraps), its literary translation into Arabic is (اتركه تحت الغطاء). The idiom (nothing ventured nothing gained), means if you do not try to

do something , you will never succeed. The literal translation of idiom into Arabic is (لا شيء مجازف لا شيء مكتسب), such as   (it is risky to spend so much money developing a new brand but, nothing ventured nothing gained). The previous examples of idioms are not difficult to translate because their literal translations are not different widely from their meaning in Arabic. Therefore, you can say that there is not big difficulties in translating these idioms, but in the following idiomatic expressions there will be difficulties to translate them. If we translate these idioms literally, we will get incorrect or meaningless translation. However, to translate the idiomatic expressions correctly, students should use specific techniques. The following are some idiomatic expressions and their literal translations, (to throw cold water over an idea or plan). The literal translation of this idiom in Arabic is   (ان تقذف ماء بارد على خطة ما), but this literal translation is meaningless translation. Another idiomatic expression, (through the roof!). This idiomatic expression translate literally into Arabic as (حتى القمة) whereas, its correct translation and meaning is (very high, higher than expected). The previous examples of idiomatic expressions mentioned above show students the problems and difficulties which encounter them in translating such idioms, they should be aware of them and they have to be capable to deal with these problems and difficulties by being good bilingual and bicultural.

5. Findings and Discussion

   The analysis of data has given the researcher useful insights into the type of difficulties that Libyan students faced when translating English idioms. The data also provide the researcher with some of the translation strategies the students used to handle these difficulties. Lack of equivalence constitutes one of the main difficulties in translating idioms (Baker, 1991). However, the findings of this study reveal that the major difficulty when translating English idioms into Arabic is not the lack of equivalence, but it is in the linguistic ability that enable a student to find a suitable equivalent. Here are two English texts involve idioms were given to fourteen students to

translate them into Arabic, but the following analysis and discussion of the data focus on three student' translation for these texts.

a. First English source text. (Ahmed presented his manager a plan to expand their business into Africa, but he threw cold water over his plan and told him to just focus on developing business in Libya.

The First Student's Translation of the First Text

The first student translated the English idiomatic expression "threw cold water over" into Arabic as (سكب عليه الماء). It is literal translation, concerned the whole first student's translation of the text which was (لقد قدم السيد احمد الى مديره في العمل خطة لتوسيع مجال العمل في افريقيا و لكن مديره في العمل لم يرضى بهذه الخطة و سكب عليه الماء مباشرة و امره ان يركز كل تفكيره على كيفية توسيع مجال العمل في ليبيا).

As we can see in the target text that the student did not understand all the whole text, but he/she understood just part of it. He/she did not understand the idiomatic expression, his translation was (سكب عليه الماء), but in the fact the boss did not threw cold water over him. He told him/her to just concentrate on developing business in Libya. So, the student used literal translation in translating the idiomatic expression, that gave misinterpretation and meaningless translation because his boss did not threw cold water on him. Also, the student used the addition such as the word (مباشرة). This word does not existed in the source text, also the words (كل تفكيره) and the word (لقد), all these words do not exist in the text.

The Second Student's Translation of the First Text

The second student's translation of the first text was as the following:
(قدم احمد لمديره خطة لتوسيع اعماله في افريقيا و لكن المدير اهمل خطته و قال له عليك ان تركز فقط على تطوير العمل في ليبيا).

It is clear that, the translation of second student was not exactly correct because he/she translated the idiom as (اهمل خطته). The text which means that Ahmed's boss took his plan, but he neglected it later. The text states that Ahmed's boss did not encourage him/her as it is mentioned in the explanation of the idiom which is existed in the previous explanation of the meaning of the second text. So, the

second student understood the idiom, but he presented it in unsuitable way. This indicates that the student did not translate the text precisely. For example, his translation of the (خطة لتوسيع الاعمال في افريقيا). The word (اعماله) was vague, we did not know his work. Hence, the student understood the idiom, but produced the text into Arabic incorrectly and the equivalent of the idiom was unsuitable.

The Third Student's Translation of the First Text

The third student translated the idiomatic expression almost correct. He translated it into Arabic as (لم يعير اي اهتمام) which is nearly the same meaning as it is mentioned in the previous explanation of the original text above. It seemed that the student had understood the meaning of the idiom and comprehend the source text and he succeed in choosing the translation techniques.

b. Second English Source Text

"No wonder Libyan people are complaining about the cost of food. Food prices have gone through the roof!" This is the second text which is translated by the students and some of their translations to this text as follow.

The First Student's Translation of the Second Text

The translation of the first student of the second text into Arabic was as

(ليس من العجيب ان يتذمر الليبيين من ارتفاع اسعار المواد الغذائية فالأسعار ارتفعت الى حد كبير)

The student's translation shows that the student understood the meaning of the idiom. He/she gave the correct equivalence because the original meaning of the idiom as mentioned in the explanation of the second text above which was "very high". The student chose the suitable equivalent and gave the correct translation. Libyan people complaining from the high prices of the food not they complaining from the general prices of the food.

The Second Student's Translation of the Second Text

The second student translated the second text into Arabic as the following

(لا عجب ان الليبيين يشتكون من غلاء الاسعار فقد ارتفعت كثيرا اسعار الاغذية)

It is clear that this student understood the meaning of the idiom, and he gave the correct translation of the text. This means that the student did not face difficulties to translate the text. This means that he/she used the suitable techniques in translating the text .

The Third Student's Translation of the Second Text

The third student's translation of the second text into Arabic was

(لا عجب ان الناس في ليبيا تشتكي من التكلفة المرتفعة للطعام فالأسعار في ارتفاع دائما).

The translation indicates that the student did not understand the idiom and he/she did not comprehend the text. The word "high" was translated by the student into Arabic as (تكلفة), whereas the correct translation of the word "high" into Arabic is (ارتفاع) not (تكلفة). However, there is a big difference between the word (تكلفة) and the word (ارتفاع) in Arabic. Thus, the student translated the text incorrectly and his/her translation was meaningless translation. In addition, he/she translated the idiom "through the roof!" as (ارتفاع دائما), whereas the correct translation of this idiom is existed in English Idiomatic Dictionary as "very high". This means that the translation of the idiomatic expression is incorrect. This indicates that the student did not comprehend the text and he/she did not recognize the meaning of the idiomatic expression. This led him/her to misunderstand and mistranslate the text.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

Although the context is extremely important for interpreting the meaning of idioms, it is not enough to rely on it as it might lead to misinterpretation . Some students mentioned that they relied on context and that explains why several of them paraphrased inaccurately the meaning of some idioms. In addition, teachers need to raise students' awareness that idioms are culture-bound. Moreover, students need to know that although paraphrasing is a good translation strategy, providing an idiom of similar meaning and form can be more effective in conveying the meaning. Since literal translation can sometimes convey the meaning of the idiom, teachers need not to discourage them from using it in the absence of equivalents. However, Libyan students might use their knowledge of

their mother tongue to judge if the translation is intelligible or not. For example, the literal translation of the idiom "scratch my back and I will scratch yours" does not lead to unintelligibility while a literal translation of "it rains cats and dogs" does. Finally, although omitting some parts of the idiom may be desirable in certain situations, the meaning should be compensated somewhere else in the text in order to avoid abridged and mutilated translation.

It could be recommended that culture translation should be taught to undergraduate students to expose them to the cultural differences between languages which could translate significantly. First, students should avoid using paraphrasing techniques as much as possible. This is only recommended when there is no equivalent in the target language. Second, students should be trained to use the effective strategies usually used for translating idiomatic expressions. Third, students should avoid using literal translating idiomatic expressions, and they should use specialized dictionaries in idiomatic expressions.

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