

التعامل مع العبارات الاصطلاحية في الترجمة: دراسة تطبيقية

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الملخص:

تثير العبارات الاصطلاحية الكثير من المشاكل بالنسبة للمترجمين، ولهذا فإن هذا البحث يستعرض أهمية العبارات الاصطلاحية في اللغة عموماً وفي ترجمة النصوص الأدبية خصوصاً بالإضافة إلى أساليب ترجمتها. وخلال عملية الترجمة تخضع العبارات الاصطلاحية للطرق المختلفة التي ينتهجها المترجمون أثناء نقلها من النص الأصل إلى النص الهدف.

يعتبر هذا البحث دراسة نوعية وصفية مقتضبة لترجمة العبارات الاصطلاحية في النصوص الأدبية من العربية إلى الإنكليزية كما تحاول الدراسة تسليط الضوء على كيفية تعامل المترجمين مع العبارات الاصطلاحية عند نقلها إلى اللغة الهدف وإن كان النص الهدف يحقق الخصائص البراغماتية والمفرداتية للعبارات الاصطلاحية أو لا. موضوع التحليل رواية بعنوان دمشق يا بسمة الحزن للكاتبة السورية ألفة الإدلبي ترجمها إلى الإنكليزية بيتر كلارك حيث يتم بحث سؤالين: أولهما كيف تعامل المترجم مع هذه العبارات الاصطلاحية عند ترجمتها إلى الإنكليزية؟ وثانيهما كيف يمكننا الوصول إلى مرادف مقبول للعبارات الاصطلاحية في الرواية قيد الدراسة؟

ولتحقيق هذين الهدفين يعتمد البحث على المبادئ التي اعتمدها منى بيكر (1992) والتي تنعكس في عدة مستويات ضمن النص بدءاً من الكلمة ومروراً بمكونات النص ووصولاً إلى الأفكار التي تهيمن على الثقافات واللغات.

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Dealing with Idiomatic Expressions in Translation: A Case Study

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Abstract:

Idiomatic expressions raise many challenges for translators. The importance of idioms, generally in language and particularly in translation, as well as the way(s) in which they are translated, is investigated in this paper. Within the process of translation, idiomatic expressions are subject to different approaches opted for by translators when they transfer them from the source text into the target text.

The present paper is a brief descriptive qualitative study of the translation of idiomatic expressions in literary texts from Arabic into English. The study is an attempt to investigate how translators deal with idioms when transferring them to the target language, and to determine whether the target text fulfills the lexical and pragmatic characteristics of the idiomatic expression or not. The subject of the analysis is a novel, *Sabriya: Damascus Bitter Sweet*, by the Syrian author Ulfat Idilbi translated by Peter Clark. Two questions are investigated: How does the translator deal with these idiomatic expressions when translating them into English? And how can we achieve acceptable equivalents of idiomatic expressions in the novel under study? To achieve these objectives, the study relies on the principles of the approach proposed by Baker (1992) which are reflected at a number of levels within the text, from the word up through the components of texts to the worldviews that underlie cultures and languages.

1. Introduction

Speakers from different cultures do not always share the same values and attitudes (Valdes 1986). They express themselves in different ways, convey different views, value different principles, and adopt different convictions. Throughout these processes, they use different idioms and idiomatic expressions to express different situations. The role of the process of translation is to bridge the gap between the two languages (i.e. the source language (SL) and the target language (TL)) in an attempt to find out the best solutions conveying both the denotative and connotative meanings of each expression.

Translating idiomatic expressions has always been a difficult and demanding process for translators. Even skillful and qualified translators, who are familiar with the target language and its cultural characteristics, cannot rival native speakers in deciding the meaning and appropriate usage of some idiomatic expressions, in addition to determining their appropriate equivalents in the TL.

It is the objective of this paper to shed the light on the notion of idioms and idiomatic expressions and to examine the frequently-used linguistic choices, strategies and techniques adopted by translators in dealing with idiomatic expressions to reach a target text (TT) that conforms to the linguistic and discursal norms of the TL. The subject of analysis is the novel *Sabriya: Damascus Bitter Sweet* by the Syrian author Ulfat Idilbi and its English translation by Peter Clark. The paper is also concerned with the problem of equivalence in translation since equivalence is regarded as a tool for detailed comparison.

2. The Notion of "Idioms" and "Idiomatic Expressions"

An idiom is strictly defined by the Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics as ‘an expression which functions as a single unit and whose meaning cannot be worked out from its separate parts’ (Richards & Schmidt, 2010: 270), referring to the strict meaning of idioms such as “It’s raining cats and dogs”. However, other definitions broaden the term to encompass any fixed expression that does not necessarily get its meaning from its individual lexical items and that does not always conform to the syntactic and semantic rules, applying to a wide range of phraseological structures, such as collocations, formulaic greetings, clichés, proverbs, sayings and other conventionalized expressions which, although idiomatic to some extent, are not idioms in the strict sense of the word (Malmkjær, 2010: 266). However, this definition is too broad that is truer of formulaic expressions than of idioms. The present study adopts the strict sense of idioms.

Idioms can be classified in different ways. According to grammatical function, idiomatic expressions can be classified into five types:

- 1) Nominal idioms, which function as noun phrases, e.g. “a black sheep”.
- 2) Adjectival idioms, which function as adjectives, e.g. “out of the question”.
- 3) Verbal idioms, which function as predicators or verb phrases, e.g. “cry over spilled milk”.
- 4) Adverbial idioms, which function as adverbials, e.g. “with one’s eyes closed”.
- 5) Sentence idioms, which function as a whole sentence, e.g. “When the cat’s away, the mice will play”.

Idiomatic expressions can be further classified into seven extra groups according to their form. The following classification is adapted from McCarthy (1998: 130–131):

- 1) Prepositional expressions, like “at the drop of a hat”.
- 2) Binomials and trinomials, which are irreversible combinations with “and”, like “black and blue”.
- 3) Frozen similes, which are characterized by the use of the word “as” ,like “cool as a cucumber”.
- 4) Possessive ’s phrases, like “a king’s ransom”.
- 5) Opaque nominal structures, like “Achilles’ heel”.
- 6) Idiomatic speech routines, gambits and discourse markers, which are very frequent in conversation, like “by the way”.
- 7) Cultural allusions, including some quotations, slogans, sayings and proverbs which are all identified by those who share the cultural context, like “Don’t put all your eggs in one basket”.

Both classifications, whether according to function or form, will be used in the present study throughout the analysis of data.

3. Features of Idiomatic Expressions

Idiomatic expressions are linguistic sequences that could be long or short. They have special features that all idiomatic expressions share, which makes them distinctive. These features have to do with three aspects: construction, meaning and usage. These idiomatic expressions are distinctive in the way they are normally constructed or produced, the way they convey meaning and the level of difficulty associated with their use.

The first feature is related to the structure of these expressions as they are not usually built up word-by-word. They are non-compositional phrases with a degree of fixedness at the lexico-grammatical level. However, this feature is not an absolute characteristic; this degree of syntactic fixedness varies among idiomatic expressions. For example, the expression “in black and white” has an irreversible word order. Similarly, some of them do not adhere to the normal grammatical rules such as the expression “like father like son”. On the other hand, McCarthy (1998: 130) reports a degree of syntactic flexibility in some expressions like “to turn a blind eye to something” which can be nominalized and pluralized in sentences like “Blind eyes have been turned to ...”. In this regard, Baker (1992: 63) states that "...idioms and fixed expressions are at the extreme end of the scale from collocations in one or both of these areas: flexibility of patterning and transparency of meaning. They are frozen patterns of languages which allow little or no variation in form and, in the case of idioms, often carry meanings which cannot be deduced from their individual components."

The second feature of idiomatic expressions is the degree of transparency that the expression possesses in regard to meaning. Though some of these expressions are transparent in the sense that their meaning can be figured out from the individual words, most of these expressions are opaque where the meaning of the expression is treated as a holistic unit. Most of these expressions are treated as single chunks "whose meanings are accessed directly" (Malmkjær, 2010:266). This could be explained in the semantic pragmatic fixedness associated with the use of these expressions.

The third feature of idiomatic expressions is that there is a level of difficulty some non-native speakers of English encounter while using idiomatic expressions (Maisa & Karunakaran, 2013:118). This is most evident when there is a mismatch between the idiomatic expression used in the SL, which is Arabic in the case study in this paper, and the one used in the TL, which is English in our case study. Therefore, idiomatic expressions are socio-linguistic chunks that are in most cases culturally-bound.

4. Idiomatic Expressions in Translation

Several scholars and researchers in the field of translation studies have investigated the treatment of idiomatic expressions in translation. In fact, they reveal different challenges associated with the translation of idiomatic expressions. Baker (1992) is the most notable researcher to discuss this issue in relation to English and Arabic. One challenge in dealing with idiomatic expressions is the ability of the translator to recognize idiomatic expressions as they are not always obvious. When an idiom is recognized, problems of interpreting it arise. Some

idioms are 'misleading'; they may appear obvious because they have a logical literal interpretation. However, they have also an idiomatic meaning. There are also situations when an idiom in the SL has a clear counterpart in the TL but it has a totally or partially different meaning.

Moreover, there are the challenges of translating idioms. The first problem is that an idiom or a fixed expression may have no equivalent in the TL. Some idioms are culture-specific items which are untranslatable. Moreover, an idiom or fixed expression may have a similar counterpart in the TL, but its context of use may be different. On the other hand, an idiomatic expression may be used in the ST in both its literal and idiomatic meanings. Therefore, the play on idioms cannot be successfully achieved unless the TL idiom corresponds to the form and meaning of the SL idiom. The last difficulty is the variation between SL and TL regarding the use of idioms, the context of usage and the frequency of use.

To meet these challenges, Baker (1992) offers several strategies. Initially, she recommends using an idiomatic expression of similar meaning and form. If such an expression is not available in the TL, it is recommended to use an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form. If both strategies are not possible, the translator can resort to paraphrasing, and in some cases to omission.

5. Analysis of Idiomatic Expressions in *Sabriya: Damascus Bitter Sweet*

As mentioned above, the objective of the present paper is the analysis of idiomatic expressions in the novel *Sabriya: Damascus Bitter Sweet* by the Syrian novelist Ulfat Idilbi and the investigation of the techniques followed by the translator Peter Clark in translating these terms into the English language. In the analysis of the translation procedures used in translating these expressions, Baker's (1992) strategies are used. Translated idiomatic expressions are classified into two categories: idiomatic expressions translated appropriately and those translated inappropriately due to...

5.1. Idiomatic Expressions Translated Appropriately

In the novel under study, the translator managed to convey the meaning of some expressions within the context. This section deals with the appropriately translated expressions with a brief description of the techniques employed by the translator. In fact, context, with its three components: the communicative, the pragmatic and the semiotic (Hatim & Mason: 1990), plays a role in determining the appropriateness of each expression discussed. behind the utterance. Austin's (1962) three different kinds of actions which are performed when a language user

produces an utterance are taken into consideration. These acts are the locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts.

An instance of the appropriate translation occurs in example (1), where two different idioms are used in both the ST and TT conveying the same illocutionary act and attitude by the use of the same form.

الناس أصبحت ضنينة بأموالها، تحفظ قرشها الأبيض ليومها الأسود. (1)

People have become tight with their money, **putting pennies aside for a rainy day**.

Another example of the usage of an idiom with a similar form and meaning in both the SL and TL is the following one:

بنت الكلب... ماذا فعلت لها حتى تريدني أن أموت؟! (2)

Bitch! What have I done to her that she wants me to die?

حلي عني يا مره... أصبحت والله لا تطاقين، بالليل والنهار لا حديث لك إلا حديث ابنك راغب (3)

Give it a rest woman... In the name of Allah, you've become unbearable. Day and night, you talk only of that son of yours, Raghieb.

In example (3), the expression "give it a rest" is an idiom widely used in the TL. Though its component words are different from those used in the ST utterance, it conveys the same illocutionary act and meaning intended by the ST producer.

قالت أمي وهي خارجة: (4)

بلا كلام فارغ، **النصيب بيد الله!**

"You're both talking nonsense," Mother said as she left the room. "**Marriages are made in heaven.**"

In example (4), both ST and TT utterances are well established idioms. They convey the same attitude in different structures. Therefore, the translator resorted to the strategy of using an idiom with a similar meaning and a dissimilar form.

نظرت نيرمين فجأة إلى ساعتها وقالت: (5)

سرقنا الوقت، لقد تأخرت ولم أعد أستطيع الذهاب إلى المكتبة.

Nirmin suddenly looked at her watch.

"**Time has flown by**," she said. "I'm late. I can't go to the bookstore now."

Example (5) is an explicit case of the usage of an idiom with the same message but by the usage of a different form as the two expressions "سرقنا الوقت" and "time has flown by" consist of different forms; the transitive verb is translated into an intransitive verb. However, both of them are idioms which have the same pragmatic value and convey the same illocutionary act.

قال أبي: (6)

روحة بلا رجعة... من قال أننا نريد أن نرى وجهك، وجه النحس.

Father said, "**Good riddance**. Who says we want to see your face of ill omen?"

(7) فكرت قليلاً ثم قالت:

لا تؤاخذيني يا بنتي، أنا والله من يوم ما أصابتنني هذه المصيبة أصبح عقلي ما هو معي، أحكي طالع نازل لأفش قلبي.

"Don't blame me, my girl," she said. "By Allah, from the day I suffered this tragedy my mind has not been the same. I'm saying all sort of things so as **to get it all out of my system**."

Though the two idioms "أفش قلبي" and "get it all of my system" in example (7) use different stylistic and structural methods, they both convey the same pragmatic value and attitude. Therefore, as it is apparent in examples (6) and (7), the translator substitutes an idiom with another idiom using different component words but conveying the message intended by the ST producer in a way that fits within the context.

خشية أن يتواضح علي وقد أصبح قد البغل. (8)

... for fear of him being offensive to me. He has become **the size of a mule**.

In example (8), paraphrasing is employed to convey the meaning because even in English "the size of a mule" implies that he is a grown-up and mature man. Though the idiomatic connotation is lost, denotative and connotative meanings are preserved.

الحمد لله مات في حياة أولاده، ومن خلف ما مات (9)

We thank Allah that he died while his children were still living. **He who leaves children never dies**.

In example (9), the translator uses paraphrasing because an equivalent idiom in the target culture is not available. However, the TL expression conveys the notion of immortality which is the purpose of using the idiom; thus, it is considered acceptable.

الحياة عندي لا تساوي قشرة بصلة. الموت أهون عندي من أن آتي بولد من رجل لا أحبه. (10)

As far as I'm concerned, life **isn't worth an onion skin**. Death means less to me than to bear the child of a man I don't love.

In example (10), paraphrasing conveys the meaning although the utterance loses the idiomatic force it carries in the SL.

كانت أُمِّي تسميك بيضة العقر. (11)

My mother named you **Fruit of a Barren womb**

In the previous example, the idiom is about a myth widely known in the SL culture. It is about the only child who is born after many years of sterility. The idiom is rendered into the TL by paraphrasing where the translator deviates from the form of the ST message because of the lack of a parallel myth in the TL culture.

ما ذنبي أنا إذا لم يفتح الله عليه بالعلم، مثله كثيرون؟ (12)

Why is it my fault when **he has not been endowed with learning**?

In example (12), the idiomatic expression is translated by the translator by the adoption of the technique of paraphrasing. The translator substitutes the expression “يفتح الله عليه بالعلم” by an explanation with a variation of the form and point of view of the message.

Likewise, the same situation applies to example (13), where the translator resorts to paraphrasing in translating an idiomatic expression.

احك يا سيدي. مَنَّتْكَ عَلَى نَفْسِكَ. (13)

Speak my good man. **You're not doing me a favor**.

قالت خالتي: (14)

هون عليك يا شيخ، العوض على الله.

“Be patient, old friend,” said my aunt. “**Allah will bring compensation**.”

Example (14) demonstrates the usage of paraphrasing to translate idiomatic expressions as the translator changes the form of the message in the ST.

رحنا أنا وراغب نهون عليهما الأمر ونقول لهما: "وعسى أن تكرهوا شيئاً وهو خير لكم" (15)

Raghib and I tried to make it seem less important.

“**It may happen that you hate a thing which is good for you**,” we said, quoting the Qur'an.

In example (15), the religious connotative meaning is conveyed by the addition of the explanation “quoting the Qur'an”.

لقد خبيت ظني فيك، أه من الرجال، على رأي المثل: المؤمنة بالرجال كالحاملة الماء بالغربال (16)

I'm disappointed in you. Oh, you men! As the proverb says, "**She who trusts a man is like one carrying water in a sieve.**"

The idiomatic expression is rendered into the TL by the usage of paraphrasing where the translator successfully conveys the message intended by the ST producer by changing the form of the ST message.

إذا استطعت يا بنتي أن أطعمهم من عرق جبينى... هل أستطيع أن أدفع أجرة الغرفة؟ (17)

I can then feed them **as a result of my own efforts**..., my girl, but can I pay the rent for a room?

In the examples of paraphrasing above, the translator explains the idioms rather than gives the exact equivalent of the Arabic utterance. However, though they lose some of their global cultural connotation which is normal when we deal with as distinctive cultures and languages as Arabic and English, they convey the pragmatic value within the textual context given for each idiom.

5.2. Idiomatic Expressions Translated Inappropriately

In some instances in the Arabic novel, the idioms are translated into English inappropriately; the translator resorts to one technique where another can serve better by conveying the intended meaning within the context where the utterance occurs. In other words, inappropriateness, may not mean wrong translation; there might be a better choice to be used.

(18) إذا استطعت يا بنتي أن أطعمهم من عرق جبينى وما زالوا يا نار قلبي كذب لحم يلزمهم فت خبز فهل أستطيع أن أدفع أجرة الغرفة والشهر وراء الباب؟

I can then feed them as a result of my own efforts, my girl, and they are still flesh and blood, my heart's delight, and **they need a crust of bread**, but can I pay the rent for a room? We're at the end of the month.

In example (18), the usage of paraphrasing is faulty conveying a different denotative and connotative meaning.

(19) هل سموني صبرية لأصبر وأصبر، وماذا بعد الصبر إلا المحرقة والقبر؟

Did they call me Sabriya because it means long-suffering? I am long-suffering, **what is there left but the undertaker and the tomb?**

In examples (18) and (19), the idioms are translated literally by the usage of paraphrasing because there are no equivalent idioms available in the TL. However, this omits the intended meaning and gives ambiguous sentences within the local context. The translator could have

used clearer expressions to convey the intended message more accurately. For example, the translator could use "They are still young. It takes a lot of effort to get them brought up.." and "Patience does not get you anything; it only gets you more waiting." respectively.

أذهبي ونامي في غرفتك. سندع الآن كل شيء على حاله حتى الصباح... الصباح رياح (20)

Go and sleep in your room. We'll leave everything as it is until the morning. **Tomorrow is another day.**

(21) رحمها الله

May Allah have mercy on her soul.

In examples (20) and (21), though the use of paraphrasing conveys the meaning and gives an intelligible equivalence, there is a better choice. There is an equivalent idiom in the target culture which conveys the same message; thus, paraphrasing is not the best choice. Equivalent idioms like "Take each day as it comes" and "May she rest in peace" can be used respectively to keep the idiomatic force of the expressions.

إذا استطعت يا بنتي أن أطعمهم من عرق جبيني وما زالوا يا نار قلبي كيب لحم يلزمهم فت خبز، هل (22)
أستطيع أن أدفع أجرة الغرفة والشهر وراء الباب؟

I can then feed them as a result of my own efforts, my girl, and they are still flesh and blood, my heart's delight, and they need a crust of bread, but can I pay the rent for a room? **We're at the end of the month.**

Here, the translator resorts to paraphrasing. However, the TT expression does not convey the same meaning. Therefore, though paraphrasing can be appropriate, the way the expression is paraphrased is considered inappropriate within the global context of the Syrian culture; this idiom is used to show that days pass quickly. A better translation can be "A month follows another and the salary is not enough."

6. Conclusion

The analyzed data is examined adopting Baker's model with the aim of preserving the pragmatic and the semiotic specifications of the idiomatic expression. Whenever an idiomatic expression is to be translated, it is recommended at the beginning to search for an idiom which has the same form and meaning which means the same denotative and connotative meanings or the same locutionary and illocutionary acts within the context of the utterance.

If the idiomatic expression does not exist in the TL, the translator can look for another idiomatic expression in the TL that helps relay the same attitudinal meaning that has been relayed in the ST by using different words from those used in the ST idiom. Thus, the equivalent idiom can have an effect similar to that conveyed by the sign in the SL. Yet, if both techniques cannot be applied and the culture-specific item does not exist in the TL and there is no way to replace it by another one, the translator may try to preserve the pragma-semiotic specifications of the sign through paraphrasing. Thus, context and availability of an equivalent in the target culture of an idiom in the ST is an important factor of the appropriateness of translation.

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