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## **Problems of English Idioms in Translation**

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# Dedication

In the Name of God the Most Merciful and Most Compassionate,

This work is dedicated to my parents; my dear father and my beloved mother without whom, I would not have been what I am. Thank you father and mother for all your sacrifices.

It is dedicated also to all my sisters and brothers and every member of my family.

All those who know me and who would be interested in reading my dissertation.

## List of Abbreviations

S: Source

SL: Source Language

SLT: Source Language Text

ST: Source Text

T: Target

TL: Target Language

TT: Target Text

TLT: Target Language Text

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## List of Phonetic Symbols

The following Arabic Alphabet transliteration System is used to translate Arabic words and expressions used throughout this work. It is organized based on Pr. Bouhanian's transcription program "Simplified Arabic Normal"

Arabic letteres	Phonetic Symbols	Arabic Letteres	Phonetic Symbols
ا	ʔ	ض	d
ب	b	ط	t̤
ت	t	ظ	d
ث	θ	ع	ʕ
ج	ʒ	غ	ɣ
ح	ħ	ف	f
خ	χ	ق	q
د	d	ك	k
ذ	ð	ل	l
ر	r	م	m
ز	z	ن	n
س	s	ه	h
ش	ʃ	و	w
ص	ʂ	ي	j

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## **Abstract**

In our present time, translation becomes an essential activity because of the need to deal with people who speak different languages. The present research investigates the students' difficulties in translating English idioms into Arabic and their ability to understand their figurative sense. Idioms are part of metaphorical language that has a surface as well as a deep meaning. For this reason they are problematic for translators and foreign learners who are not familiar with them. To show how problematic they may be, a test has been given to a sample of third year students of English at Adrar University. The test consists of fifteen sentences each of which contains an idiomatic expression to be translated into Arabic to check the validity of our hypothesis. We have hypothesized that students will fail to grasp the figurative sense of the English idioms and translate them literally into Arabic. The results obtained show that, in most sentences students' ability to infer the intended sense of the expressions was very limited and they stick to literal translation as a strategy to translate them into Arabic.

## **General Introduction**

Translation trainees, most of the time, come across some difficulties while carrying out their reproduction from one language to another, especially when the translation process occurs between two originally and culturally distinct languages such as English and Arabic. Translating idiomatic expressions is one of the challenging issues in the area of translation; students usually find difficulties in recognizing an expression as idiomatic and understanding its exact meaning. This is mainly due to the fact that idioms carry a metaphorical meaning that cannot be understood literally.

I have chosen this area of investigation, namely idioms translation as we have noticed that many students of English Department have encountered some problems, while they attempted to translate idioms from English into Arabic. We have often been unable to find the exact equivalent terms; the words are sometimes inexistent and sometimes have less expressive meanings in English than in Arabic.

Accordingly, the main objective of the present study is to shed some light on the different problems and pitfalls that 3<sup>rd</sup> year students of the English Department at Adrar University encounter while translating idioms from English into Arabic. It also tries to enlighten students with strategies suggested by translation theorists to overcome such difficulty and carry out their translation process in an adequate way. In this sense, our research enquiries mainly fall on the following research questions:

- 1) What are the general difficulties that students of English encounter during the translation process?
- 2) What are the problems and pitfalls faced when translating idioms particularly?  
And what are the reasons behind them?
- 3) What are the possible strategies that can be used to overcome these difficulties?

In the light of the research questions mentioned above, it is hypothesized that 3<sup>rd</sup> year (LMD) students of English at Adrar University would find a difficulty in understanding the metaphorical meaning of English idiomatic expressions, finding their exact equivalents in Arabic. Thus, they would translate them literally into the Target Language TL (Arabic).

It is also assumed that students are not aware of the problems that arise in Arabic-English translation of fixed expressions and the strategies to solve them because they have had no theoretical courses about the topic during their studies i.e. if students are more aware about those problems and strategies, it may be easy then to deal with such expressions.

In order to test our hypothesis and answer the research questions, a quantitative method will be used. A translation test consisting of fifteen English sentences each of which contain an English idiomatic expression to be translated into Arabic will be administered to 3<sup>rd</sup> year LMD students of English at Adrar University to test their ability to understand and translate idioms from one language to another. The choice of third year students is motivated by the fact that they have been studying the module of translation in addition to their curriculum, for two years and therefore they are supposed to have received basic theoretical background knowledge about the translation task and have reached a certain level of proficiency in English.

To tackle the issues of our work, we deliberately divided the present dissertation into two parts. The first part, which is theoretical, is divided in turn into two chapters. The first one provides theoretical background knowledge about the process of translation, mainly its definitions, types, problems and some

suggested strategies to deal with such problems. The second chapter deals with idioms as a translation problem. It provides an overview about the nature of idioms, their features, types, semantic classifications with more focus on the difficulties associated with idioms translation that are due to the differences between languages. It also includes some strategies for translating idioms appropriately by some well known translation theorists namely (Baker, Ghazala... etc ). The Second part is devoted to the description and the analysis of the collected data as well as the results obtained to check our hypothesis. Finally we suggest some solutions to overcome those obstacles.

# Chapter One

## *Basic Concepts in Transation*

## 1.1 Introduction

Translation has always been understood to refer to the rendering of messages and texts of the Source Language (SL) into the Target one (TL). It is noticed that dealing with two languages is somehow difficult, especially when they belong to two different origins such as English and Arabic. Our research, then, will examine a specific case of difficulty at the level of words combination in translation which is “idioms’ translation”. This opening chapter is devoted to a discussion of the basic concepts in translation mainly, its definition, types, and problems that translators especially beginners usually face during the process of translation.

## 1.2 Definition of Translation

Recently, translation as a main branch of Applied Linguistics has been given a major concern. Thus, many definitions were introduced to the process of translation.

According to Catford (1965: 2) the term translation is viewed as the replacement of textual material in one language by equivalent textual material in another language. That is, the replacement of a linguistic element in the Source Language by an equivalent linguistic element in the Target Language. Zagy (2000), on the other hand, considers the aim of translation as transferring the meaning to the (TL) rather than converting the words and grammatical forms of the original language.

As far as Ghazala is concerned, translation refers to “*all processes and methods used to convey the meaning of the source language into the target one*” (1995: 1-2). Translation is then, the transmission of messages from one language to

another. According to him (Ghazala), the process of transmission is done through the use of

*“(1) words which already have an equivalent in Arabic language (2) new words for which no equivalent was available in Arabic before.(3) foreign words written in Arabic letters and foreign words changed to suit Arabic pronunciation, spelling , and grammar”(Ghazala :1995 ).*

For more clarification to this definition here are some examples:

To teach →..... يدرس [judarrisu]

Television→..... تلفاز [tilfaz]

Asperin→..... أسبيرين [aspirin]

philosophy→..... فلسفة [fəlsafa] (Ghazala,1995)

From the above mentioned definitions, one may notice that the term translation is very wide and can be understood in many different ways. Yet, it refers typically to the reproduction of (SL) linguistic materials into another language (TL).

### 1.3 Types of Translation

Translation has been divided into different types by different scholars. As far as Ghazala is concerned, there are two main types of translation that are “Literal and Free translation”. This latter, according to him (Ghazala) are the most important and frequently used types that reflect more or less the remaining types.



### 1.3.1 Literal translation

#### 1.3.1.1 Literal Translation of Words

Literal or Word-for –Word Translation is a subtype of translation in which each Linguistic unit of the SL is rendered into its equivalent in the TL regardless of the differences between the two languages in terms of grammar, word-order and context. That is, the main interest of the translator in this type is to find an equivalent of SL Word in the TL taking into consideration the word-order, grammar of the SL rather than the TL. For example:

- a) The world is a small village is translated into

العالم قرية صغيرة يكون [qarjatun saxiratun jaku:nu əlʕalamu]

instead of العالم قرية صغيرة [əlʕalamu qarjatun saxiratun]

- a) This book is very useful is translated into

مفيد جدًا يكون الكتاب [mufidun ziddan jaku:nu haða elkitabu] instead of

هذا الكتاب مفيدًا جدًا [haða elkitabu mufiddun zidan]

- b) He is living from hand to mouth

فم إلى يد من يعيش يكون هو [famin ela jad min jaʕif jaku:nu huwwa]

instead of يعيش على الكفاف [jaʕifu ʕala elkafaf]

(Ghazala, 1995)

Though, this method or type of translation seems to be an easy way to translate with. Yet it is considered as a risk in the sense that, grammar, word-order and context of the TL are totally neglected and it relies on the SL only what may lead to the destruction of meaning. For instance, in terms of grammar the English verb “is”

is translated into “يكون”[jakunu] in Arabic, but dropping it is better because it is out of place.

### 1.3.1.2 One-to-One Literal Translation

In this type of translation each word is translated into a word of the same category in the TL. That is, a noun is translated into a noun, a verb into a verb, idiom into an idiom and so on. Moreover, it insists on having the same kind and number of words taking into consideration the grammar and word-order of the SL. For more clarification, let's consider the following examples:

a) Translation is a branch of linguistics. It is interesting.

Is translated into الترجمة تكون فرع في علم اللغة. هي تكون ممتعة

[attarɣama taku:nu farɕun fi ɕilmi alluxa hija taku:nu mumtiɕa]

Instead of [attarɣama farɕun mumtiɕun fi ɕilmi alluxa] الترجمة فرع ممتع في علم اللغة.

b) My classmates are kind-hearted. Is translated into زملائي يكونون طيبوا القلب

[zumalaʔi jakunu:na ʔajjibu elqalb] Instead of [zumalaʔi ʔajjibu elqalb] زملائي طيبوا القلب

(Ghazala, 1995)

This type resembles the first one in neglecting the TL word-order and grammar, and considering those of SL only. Though, this method is supposed to be more acceptable than the literal translation of words, it is still inefficient because translators should take into account both SL's and TL's grammar and word-order

not only those of SL. In addition, translators from English to Arabic or vice-versa are not supposed to give the same number and type of SL linguistic items. In other words, the Arabic sentence, in general, starts with a verb as opposed to the English one which begins with a noun or pronoun. Besides, the adjective in Arabic comes after the noun. Yet, it precedes it in English. Consequently, the same word-order cannot be respected while translating from English into Arabic.

Additionally, number and type of words cannot be respected as well because there are certain words in English that are translated into Arabic in two words and others in Arabic which are translated in two words in English. Here are some examples:

- a) Mutton → ..... لحم الخروف [lahmu ʔal ɣaruf]
- b) Satellite → ..... قمر صناعي [qamar sinaaʕi]
- c) Servant maid → ..... خادمة [ɣaadima]
- d) Shake hands → ..... مصافحة [muṣafaḥa]

### 1.3.1.3 Direct Translation or Literal Translation of Meaning

Ghazala (1995:11) describes this type of translation as “*full translation of meaning*”. It is considered as the best method of Literal Translation, in that, the deficiencies that exist in the previous subtypes are removed in this type. In addition, it focuses on the translation of the real meanings of words as accurately as possible based on their context of occurrence. Moreover, unlike the above mentioned types of translation, “Literal Translation of meaning” considers the TL’s grammar, word order, context and the metaphorical use as well. The literal meaning of a given word in this type is viewed as the different meanings that this word carries in different contexts. For example, the common meaning of the English word “run” is “يجري” [jadʒri], yet, it may carries various

meanings in different contexts and each one of them is considered as literal meaning .

Examples that fellow illustrate this point:

- 1) “To run in the race”..... (يجري/ يركض) [jadʒri/ jarkudu]
- 2) “To run a company”..... (يدير شركة) [judi:ru ʃarikatan]
- 3) “In the long run”..... (على المدى البعيد) [ʕala almada albaʕid]
- 4) “To run round” ..... (يطوف/يقوم بزيارة خاطفة) [jaʔu:fu\ jaqumu bizijjara ʕa:tifa]
- 5) “To run into”..... (يلقى مصادفة) [jalqa muʕadafatan]
- 6) “To run on”..... (يستمر) [jastamirru]
- 7) “To run to fat” ..... (يميل إلى السمنة) [jami:lu ela essumna]

Ghazala (1995:11)

### 1.3.2 Free Translation

This type of translation gives more importance to meaning rather than the form. It is called free since it gives the translator enough freedom to translate something depending on his comprehension only, i.e. he is not limited by the text, context, or the denotative meaning of words. It is a translation beyond the word or sentence level. The translator has to go beyond the message and read between lines what is implicitly said in the ST. It has two subtypes that are Bound and Loose free translation.



3. Thank you Mr.Wilson. next please      تفضل بالانصراف يا سيد ويلسون  
[tafadal bilʔinʃiraf ja sajjid wilson]
4. No bacon with my breakfast, please.      أنا مسلم [ana muslim]
5. I am frighten      إبقى معي [ʔibqi maʕi]

(Ghazala, 1995, p.15)

From these translations, one may conclude that translation at this level is to some extent pragmatic since ST and TT are not directly related and it is up to the translator to render what he concluded from what is said in the original text. For example, in the sentence (1), what is concluded is that the speaker wants to attract the listeners' attention and ask them to be quite in a polite way. So, it is better to say "thank you" than "silence or keep quite", and thus, it is translated into "هدوء أيها السادة" [huduʔ ʔjjuha ʔssada]. Moreover, example (2), indicates that the time of something (such as meeting) is over and it is time to do something else. In addition, example (3) is an indirect way of telling someone that his time is over and he/she may leave. Religion in example (4) is taken into consideration therefore, "no bacon" is translated into "I am Muslim" because in Islam hog's meat is forbidden. Finally, "I am frightened" means that the speaker cannot stay alone and he is indirectly asking him/her to stay with him.

Actually, after discussing the main types of translation, we may conclude that the last type, i.e., "free translation" seems to be misleading most of the time since it goes beyond the source language and its context. Moreover, it allows the translator to translate depending on his comprehension only without taking into account the SL, and this can cause misinterpretation of the ST. Thus, the third method of literal Translation seems to be the most reasonable and best method of translation.

**1.4 Translation Problems**

During the process of translation, translators may come across several problems and difficulties. These latter can be due to grammar, lexis, phonology, culture, or style. Especially, when the SL and TL belong to two different origins such as Arabic and English; the former is of Semitic origin, yet the latter, belongs to Germanic Family.

**1.4.1 Grammatical Problems**

The differences that exist between TL and SL at the level of grammar and word order may cause serious problems and may hinder the process of translation. As far as English and Arabic are concerned, some tenses exist in English but do not exist in Arabic such as the perfect and continuous tense. Besides, in terms of the word order, the Arabic sentence could be nominal and verbal whereas the English one is always verbal. Further, the translation of the verbs “to be”, “to have”, and modals are also among the most common grammatical problems encountered in English-Arabic translation.

**1.4.2 Lexical Problems**

The different lexical problems that a translator may confront are usually due to misinterpreting or misunderstanding of some words. Among these problems we have synonymy, polysemy and monosemy, collocation, idioms, metaphors, proverbs, scientific terms, acronyms....etc. Synonymy, for example, is considered as a lexical problem because it is agreed that there is no such thing as true synonyms, and thus the choice of the adequate synonym of a given word creates a difficulty for the translator. Another problem, may raise when dealing with polysemy i.e. words that have several meanings. In addition, collocations, idioms and proverbs are generally problematic since their meanings are hard to guess and cannot be derived from their components.

### 1.4.3 Stylistic Problems

Style refers to the particular way of writing a text or a sentence. It plays an important role in the transmission of meaning in the process of translation. Stylistic problems include: fronting, formal vs informal, complex vs simple....etc. Fronting, for example, is a stylistic problem in which a word is mentioned at the beginning of a sentence in an unusual structure in order to emphasize it or to indicate that it is important. For instance, in this sentence: “professor he is” the word “professor” is stated intentionally at the beginning to indicate that it is important. Thus, the translator should keep the same structure of this sentence to have the same meaning in the TL. So, this sentence should be translated into Arabic as follow:

هو أستاذ جامعي [ustað za:miʕi huwwa] instead of [huwwa ustað za:miʕi] أستاذ جامعي هو.

Yet, this is not always accepted in the TL. Concerning formality and informality, Joos (1962) suggested a formality scale of the English language which contains five degrees as follow:

Degree of formality	Example from English	The translation in Arabic
1. Frozen Formal	“Be seated”	عليك بالجلوس [ʕalika bilʒulus]
2. Formal	“have a seat”	تفضل بالجلوس [Tafaddal bilʒulus]
3. Informal	“sit down”	[ʔiʒlis law samaħət] اجلس لو سمحت
4. Colloquial	“feel at home”	[χuð raahatak/ʔistarih/ʔirtah] خذ راحتك/ استرح/ ارتاح
5. Vulgar or slang	“sit bloody, down”	[ʔindarib ʕala qalbik] إنضرب على قلبك

**Table:01: Formality Scale in the English language (Ghazala,1995, P.203)**

Due to these stylistic elements, the translator sometimes finds it difficult to render the same style from the ST to TT as it may be not suitable in the TL to keep the same style of ST as shown in the example of fronting.



**1.4.4 Cultural Problems**

Culture and its impact on the translation process can be considered as a major barrier of the success of translation. Generally, people from different cultures perceive and view the world in different ways. Therefore, during the process of translation the translator is likely to find certain concepts that exist in SL's culture, but do not exist in the TL's one or not lexicalized in it. In Arabic and English cultures, kinship terms are expressed in distinct ways. For instance, in English culture one word only is used for father's and mother's brother that is "uncle". Yet, in Arabic each of them is lexicalized i.e. father's brother is referred to as "عم" [ʕam], and mother's one is "خال" [xal]. Moreover, in French, speakers tend to use the pronoun "vous" when addressing an important person in formal situations, and "tu" when dealing with friends, family members...etc. These cases and many others may cause problems for the translator who sometimes could not guess what the SL is speaking about precisely. Further, culture specific words and idiomatic expressions also pose serious problems for translators because they are related to culture, and their translation requires certain cultural knowledge.

**1.5 Translation strategies**

Translation, in fact, is an interesting job. Yet, it is a hard task at the meantime. During the process of translation, the translator is likely to come across several difficulties and obstacles that are generally due to the differences between the languages involved at different levels. In this respect, Baker (1992) summarizes the translation strategies that may help translators to overcome the problem of lexical equivalent at the word level as follow:

### 1.5.1 Translation by Using a General Term (a super ordinate)

This strategy is a common way of translation used to solve the problem of non equivalence between the SL and TL. When dealing with words that have no equivalent in the TL, the translator may use a more general term to refer to the specific one used in the SL in order to overcome the lack of specificity in the TL. For example, the term “date” has several hyponyms in Arabic such as “دقلة نور” [daglæt nur], “الشيخ” [aʃʃiχ], “البلح” [albaləħ]...etc. depending on its shape and color. However, these distinctions do not exist in English culture i.e. the general term is used only. Moreover, in Eskimo, they have different kinds of “Snow” and a specific term for each kind (Duranti, 1997), yet in Arabic we have only the general one “ثلج” [θalʒ]. The following example adds more clarification to this point:

The source text: أكل ثمر الدقلة قبل الإفطار شي ضروري بالنسبة لجدي

[aklu θamr eddagla qabla alʔiḡṡar ʃajʔun daruri binnisbati lizaddi]

The target text: For my grand fother eating date before breakfast is something necessary.

In our translation of the ST we have replace the specific term [θamər addagla] “ثمر الدقلة” by a more common and general one “date” to avoid confusion and misunderstanding because the English reader is not familiar with this different hyponyms. The same thing occurs when translating from the language of Eskimo into Arabic, and it is better for the translator to use the super ordinate term “snow” instead of its hyponyms since Arabs are not familiar with such distinctions.

### 1.5.2 Translation Using a more Neutral/ less Expressive Term

This method is mainly used when dealing with expressive meanings. According to Lyons (1981:143) “*expressive meaning relates to everything that falls within the scope*

of ‘self-expression’....” In other word, expressive meaning is about the person beliefs, opinions and attitudes towards certain behaviors or ideas in the real word. It differs from one person and one language to another. Hence, what may be considered as “good” in English Language, can be seen as “bad” in Arabic. In this case, the translator can use a term which is near equivalent and less expressive to simplify understanding for the TT reader.

For example:

The source text: كان بالفعل شيء مرعبا ان تحمل في بطنها طفل غير شرعي

[kana bilfiʕli ʃajʔun murʕiban ʔsn tahmila fi baṭniha ʕifʕlun ʔajru ʃarʕi]

The target text: It was something **bad** to be pregnant with an illegitimate child

It is obvious that the word “bad” in the TT has not the exact meaning of the ST’s word [murʕib] مرعب. However, sexual relationships before marriage is an immoral and forbidden behavior for Arab people especially Muslims, but in English culture, it is natural and quite normal. Therefore, in this case it is better for the translator to use “bad” as a neutral term instead of “horrible”.

### 1.5.3 Translation by Cultural Substitution

People from different cultures have distinct ways of perceiving the world and interpreting reality. Thus, the concept that exists in one culture may not exist, or is not lexicalized in another. The translator in this strategy is not supposed to find out the exact equivalent of the SL’s cultural specific term, but to keep the same impact on the TT reader is more important. In other words, the SL’s specific term may be replaced by another one in the TL that has not the same exact meaning, but it has more or less the same effect on the TT reader. Accordingly, the expression “**summer**’s day” in Shakespeare’s verse will be best translated into Arabic as follow:

Source text: shall I compare thee to a summer's day (adapted from the lectures of transation)

Target text ] هل أقارنك بـيوم ربيعي [hal ʔuqarinuki bijawmin rabi:ʕi]

We have substituted the word “summer” by “spring” since it is the season of lovely weather in Arabic countries to achieve the same Impact of the ST on the Target reader.

#### 1.5.4 Translation by Loan Words with an explanation

A loan word is a lexical term that borrowed from another language and made part in another. For Campbell (1998:63),

*“a loan word is a lexical term (a word) which has been borrowed from another language, a word which originally was not a part of the vocabulary of the recipient language but was adopted from some other language and made part of the borrowing language’s vocabulary”*

In case of newly born words and culture specific terms that have no equivalent in the TL, it will be better for the translator to keep the word in question intact and follow it by an explanation in the TT. This strategy is also used when the translator wants to keep some aspect of the SL’s culture as shown in the following examples:

Example 1:

The source text: شعر الناس بالدهشة عندما رفضت تزيين يدها بالحنة في يوم عرسها

[ʃaʃara annasu biddahʃa ʕindama rafadat tazjjina jadaha bilhanna fi jumi ʕursiha]

Target text: people were astonished when she refused to decorate her hand with **henna** (a plant that Arab women use to have a red color on their hands) in her wedding day.

Example 2: the source text is taken from (Holly Quran, Al Ahzab, p : 427)

Source text: “إنا عرضنا الأمانة على السموات والأرض والجبال فأبين أن يحملنها .....“

[ʔinna ʕaradna alʔamanata ʕala ssamawati welʔardi welʕibali faʔabajna ʔan jahmilnaha]

Target text: we have exposed el Amana (that act of keeping things that you are entrust with intact until you give it back to their owners)..., etc.

Due to the absence of the two concepts / el hanna/ and /el Amana/ in the English culture, it will be useful for the translator to use them as a loan word, and follows them by a small explanation to make things clear for the TT reader.

### 1.5.5 Translation by Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing is another solution for the problem of lexical equivalent in translation. It is used when dealing with concepts that have no equivalent in the TL, or lexicalized in another form. When the translator fails in getting the right equivalent for the ST' item, he may use a phrase which could be a definition or description of it as an alternative to express the same meaning. Baker (1992) divided this procedure in two ways:

1) Paraphrasing using related word: this way is used when the concept expressed by SL's word has an equivalent in TL, but in a different form. For instance, the Arabic word “خالة”/ʕaala/ is expressed in English by the word “aunt” that comprises both mother's and father's sister. Hence, the translator can add the term maternal (maternal aunt) to be more precise. 2) Paraphrasing using unrelated word is used when the SL's term has no equivalent in the TL. That is, a sentence that carries its meaning is used instead as mentioned before. The examples below add more clarification to this point:

Example 1:

The source text: [tufaddilu zaddati ʔirtidaʔa ʔalhajik ʕinda ʔalʕuruʕi mina ʔalbajt]

تفضل جدتي ارتداء الحايك عند الخروج من البيت

Target text: My grandmother prefers wearing a **large cloth that covers her, except her eyes** when she goes outside the home.

Example 2:

The source text: القصة عندما أنهيت تحضير الطعام وضعت في القصة

[ʕindama ʔanhajtu taħdi:ra ʔt̪taʕam wadaʕtuhu filgaʕa]

The Target text: when I finish preparing food I put it in a large plate made out of wood.

### 1.5.6 Translation by Omission

At this level, the translator may simply omit a word or words that have no equivalent in the TL, and does not play great role in the understanding of the original text. In this respect, Baker (1992:40) stated that “*If the meaning conveyed by a particular item or expression is not vital enough to the development of the text....., translators can often do simply omit translating the word or expression in question*”. It is also used in case of repetition and redundancy that may occur in the SL which is not adequate in the TL.

## 1.6 Conclusion

To sum up, on the basis of the aforementioned ideas, one may conclude that translation is not a mere replacement of words from one language to another. However, it is rather a transmission of concepts and thoughts from a culture to another. Thus, when two linguistic systems are involved in the process of translation, translators should take into account the different linguistic and cultural characteristics of both systems (SL and TL). Moreover, adequate translation entails not only linguistic knowledge about the differences between the two languages, but a clear idea about their cultures is also prerequisite. Furthermore, despite the different difficulties and obstacles that confronted translators

especially beginners, translation trainees have a number of strategies which could help them to carry out their task and make the process less challenging.

# Chapter Two

## Idioms in Relation to Translation



## 2.1 Introduction

All languages perhaps have certain phrases and sentences that their meaning cannot be understood literally. Even if we know the meaning of every single word from which they are composed, the meaning of the whole may still be opaque. Those phrases and sentences are mainly idioms and fixed expressions whose translation from one language to another is one of the major difficult tasks for translators and foreign learners. Hence, the aim of this chapter is to shed some light on the reasons that make idioms such a difficult issue for translators. This section provides a detailed theoretical background about idioms, including their definitions, characteristics, their different types, difficulties and strategies for their translation.

## 2.2 Definition of Idioms

Idioms were defined from different perspectives by different scholars. Generally, they are groups of words that have to be used as one unit to establish meaning and have, as a whole, a different meaning from that of its individual words. In this sense, Baker stated that, idioms are “*frozen patterns of language which allow little or no variation in form and.....often carry meaning which can't be deduced from their individual components*” (1992:63). In other words, idioms are fixed expressions whose meaning has nothing to do with the meaning of the isolated words that composed them. For instance, the meaning of the idiomatic expression “to have a bee in one’s bonnet” is to be continually occupied with or obsessed by one thing. This meaning is totally different from that of the separated components. Hence, a person knowing only the meaning of the words: *have*, *bee* and *bonnet*, would not be able to deduce the real meaning of the whole phrase.

Carter (1993:65) provided another definition of idioms which is nearly the same as Baker’s one. According to Carter “*idioms are special combinations with restricted forms and meanings that can't be deduced from the literal meaning of the words that make them*”. This

definition sheds light on two main characteristics of idioms that are fixedness and figurativeness. That is, most idioms have a fixed form in that they allow no linguistic variation such as replacing a word by another, or changing the words' order, and omitting or adding a word to them. Moreover, they carry a figurative meaning beyond the literal sense of words.

Besides, for Ball (1968:1) idioms are *“the use of familiar words in an unfamiliar sense”*. For example, the expression “It is raining cats and dogs” consists of familiar words as “rain”, “cats” and “dogs”. Yet, its meaning is unfamiliar; it is not the sum of the literal meaning of those words.

From the aforementioned definitions, one may notice that there is an agreement among linguists on the fact that idioms are complex units of language, they are inflexible since they often permit no syntactic and grammatical variation, and non-literal expressions. For extra clarification, the following table provides some English idiomatic expressions and their figurative meaning:

Idioms	Meaning
At the mercy of	Under control of someone;
Bury the hatchet	To make peace, to become friend after a quarrel or disagreement
Break the ice	To initiate social interchanges and conversation; to get something started
Broken dreams	Wishes or desires that can't be fulfilled
Have clean hands	To be guiltless
Honey moon	The early pleasant beginning (as the start of a marriage)

**Table 1.1: English Idioms and their meaning (adapted from Oxford dictionary 3<sup>th</sup> Ed)**

In the table above, we have introduced some examples about English idioms that are commonly used. For instance, English speakers use the expression ‘at the mercy of’ to show that somebody is extremely dependent on someone else. Besides, the idiom ‘to have a clean hand’ is used to describe a person who is usually honest and guiltless. The other features that characterize idiomatic expression besides to the figurativeness of their meaning will be discussed latter.

### 2.3 Features of Idioms

In the definitions above, we mentioned three main features of idioms that include inflexibility, complexity and figurativeness. Besides, Baker (1992: 63) identifies five features that are important for the recognition of idiomatic expressions and differentiate them from normal phrases. According to her, idioms usually do not accept the following:

- ❖ *Addition*: speakers are not allowed to add a word or an article to the component parts of the idiom because this may affect its figurative sense. For instance, the meaning of the English idiom “the long and the short of it” will completely change and become no longer idiomatic if we add the adverb “very” to it i.e. “the **very** long and the short of it”.
- ❖ *Deletion*: omitting the article “the” from the expression “kick the bucket” or the adjective “thin” in “tread on thin ice” would alter its sense as an idiom. Hence, “kick bucket” and “tread on ice” have no idiomatic meaning.
- ❖ *Replacement*: it is not possible under normal circumstances to substitute the constituent words of an idiom by others, even if those words are synonymous. For example, though the word “ship” in the expression “to give up the ship” has nearly the same meaning of boat. Yet, it will be strange to say “to give up the boat” instead of the former. Likewise, it would be odd to say “boot the pail” instead of “kick the bucket” though “boot” and “pail” have the same meaning with ‘kick’ and ‘bucket’ respectively.

- ❖ *Change in the word's order:* idioms do not allow variation in their word order as to say “it is raining dogs and cats” instead of “ it is raining cats and dogs” or “the short and the long of it” for “ the long and the short of it”.
- ❖ *Change in the grammatical structure:* grammatically speaking, idioms do not always follow the ordinary rules of grammar. They have fixed structure that is almost known and agreed upon by native speakers such as the expressions ‘by and large’, ‘trip the light fantastic’ that any change in their grammatical structure may lead to the destruction of its meaning.

With respect to the same point Glasser (2009) adds further features that make idioms distinguishable from literal expressions. In his view, idioms do not accept the following

- ❖ *Comparative:* the comparative form is another aspect of form variation that is not allowed in idiomatic expressions. For example, adding the comparative form “er” to the adjectives long and short in “the long and the short of it” or hot in “be in hot water” will alter their conventional meanings which are ‘the basic facts of a situation’ and ‘be in trouble’ respectively.
- ❖ *Predicate:* the figurative sense of an idiom can be completely changed when adding a predicate to it as using the adjective ‘sleeping’ with a predicate in “partner is sleeping” for “sleeping partner” and heart is cold for “cold heart”.
- ❖ *Passive form:* the sense of idioms, unlike literal expressions, may change when the speaker changes its form from active to passive. For instance, the passive form “ the beans were spilled” have a different meaning from the active form “they spilled the beans” in that the former refers to its literal meaning, yet the later means “ they reveal a surprise” which is idiomatic .

- ❖ *Nominalization*: replacing a verb in an idiom with a noun is also not possible in idiomatic expressions because it affects the figurativeness of its meaning.

These features make idiomatic expressions easy recognizable as idioms and distinguishable from ordinary words combinations. Further details about their different types will be discussed next.

## 2.4 Types of Idioms

### 2.4.1 Phrasal Verbs

Phrasal verbs, in English, are the most common types of idiomatic expressions. They are combination of a verb and adverbial particle with a meaning that cannot be inferred from the sum of the components' meaning. For instance, 'to take in', 'to let on', 'to come up with', 'to make up' and 'to turn off' are all phrasal verbs whose idiomatic senses are unpredictable and cannot be deduced from their individual elements' meanings. According to Baker (1992), idioms of this category are misleading. They sometimes offer logical literal interpretations beside their figurative one, what leads translators who are not familiar with them to accept the literal meaning and lose the idiomatic one. Let's consider the expression 'put down' as an instance. This latter can refer to the act of 'placing something on the floor' which is literal, or 'putting an end to something or someone' which is an idiomatic sense. Likewise, the expression 'spill the beans' might refer either to someone emptying out the content of a jar of beans' in the literal side, or to the figurative sense 'to reveal a secret'.

### 2.4.2 Idioms Violating Truth Conditions

Generally, idioms of this type are easily recognizable than others in that they go beyond reality and exceed the general truth of life. For instance, the reader of the following expressions 'to speak one's mind', 'to rain cats and dogs', 'to put the world on fire' or 'food for thought', may easily understand that he is dealing with idiomatic

expressions since they are against reality, and do not make sense when they are interpreted literally. This type includes also ill-formed expressions which do not follow the English grammatical rules such as ‘by and large’, ‘trip the light fantastic’, ‘put paid’ and ‘far and away’...etc.

### **2.4.3 Simile-idioms**

Simile-idioms include expressions that have a simile like structure; they have a form of comparison whereby a person or thing is compared to something else using the conjunctions ‘like or as’. For example, ‘like a fish out of water’ which means to be in a very difficult situation, ‘like two peas in a pod’ i.e. to be very close or intimate, ‘as free as a bird’ to be so free and ‘as dry as a bone’ that is to describe something as being very dry. According to Moon (1998), the function of simile idioms is to compare and emphasize. Semantically, most similes are transparent i.e. they are easily understood.

## **2.5 Degrees of idiomaticity**

Scholars who are interested in the study of idioms tried to classify them according to different criteria. In terms of meaning, idiomatic phrases vary from each other to the extent to which their figurative sense can be inferred from that of their components. In other words, the idiomatic meaning is a hierarchy of opacity and figurativeness with which some idioms tend to be more opaque and semantically rigid than others which are by contrast transparent and easily interpreted. Based on that, idioms have been classified into different categories that are as follow:

### **2.5.1 Opaque Idioms**

Idioms of this type are also called pure or non-literal idioms. They are considered as the most difficult type of idioms, due to the fact that there is no direct relationship between the literal meaning of their parts and the intended one of the whole expression.

For instance, unless we have background knowledge about the expression '*to kick the bucket*', it will be difficult or rather impossible to decode and interpret its idiomatic sense from that of the separated components. Moreover, unlike the other types of idioms, opaque expressions are more restricted to idioms' principles such as inflexibility; they do not allow modifications in their structure simply because their idiomatic meaning will completely be altered.

Likewise, Ifill (2002) adds that, expressions of this type cannot also be transformed to the passive form because they are syntactically frozen. For instance, the sentence 'John bit the dust last night' cannot be changed into 'the dust was bitten by John...'. The following are examples of pure idioms:

- a) *To burn one's boat* (to make retreat impossible)
- b) *Smell a rat* (to suspect that something is wrong)
- c) *Shoot the breeze* (to have a conversation in an informal way)
- d) *To rain cats and dogs* (to rain heavily) (Kharma, 1997. 41)

Unless we have a background knowledge about the above listed expressions and their idiomatic usage, it will be difficult to infer their actual meaning from the meanings of their components because as we can see there is no relationship between their real sense and that of the separated words from which they are composed.

### 2.5.2 Semi- Transparent idioms

Semi-transparent idioms may also be referred to as semi-metaphorical or semi-literal. They refer to those expressions that their intended meaning is partially inferred from the meaning of its parts, i.e. there is a small link between the figurative and the literal meaning which is not as clear as fully transparent idioms. In this sense, Fernando (1996:35) pointed out that "*semi-transparent idioms involve at least one word*

*that carries its literal meaning*” For instance, in the expression *beat a dead horse*, the verb *beat* includes repeated action as part of its meaning which is still retained in the figurative one ‘to insist on something beyond hope’ Some idioms of this kind are: *skate on thin ice*, *beat a dead horse*, *to play with fire*...etc. Actually, the individual parts of these expressions play a little role in understanding the entire meaning of the whole idiom by contrast to transparent idioms whose figurative sense is compositional as we will see in the next part.

### 2.5.3 Transparent Idioms

Usually, transparent (literal) idioms are self-explanatory and do not require much effort to be understood because their idiomatic meaning is clearly related to the literal one. That is, their meaning is compositional and thus it can be inferred from the words that make up the idiom. Moreover, transparent expressions by contrast to opaque idioms, are to some extent syntactically flexible and may except certain modifications without affecting the figurative sense. For example, they can retain their idiomatic meaning even they are used in passive voice such as the expression *keep tabs on something* which has the same meaning when it is used as follow; *tabs were kept* on something ( to watch sth/sb carefully to know what is happening so that you can control a particular situation) (Ifill, 2002). Here are examples of transparent idioms:

To see the light of day (to come to the end of a very busy time)

Barking up the wrong tree (to make the wrong choice; to ask the wrong person)

Fight a losing battle (to try to do something that you will probably never succeed)

(Fernando, 1996)



## 2.6 Translation of idioms: Problems and difficulties

Translating idioms represents a major challenge for translators and foreign learners. This latter, can be due to the fact that their meaning is not literal; the translator must go beyond the explicit meaning of the constituents and read between the lines to figure the intended meaning of the whole expression. In Baker's (1992) terms,

*“the main problems that idiomatic and fixed expression pose in translation relate to two main areas: the ability to recognize and interpret an idiom correctly, and the difficulties in rendering various aspects of meaning that an idiom or a fixed expression conveys into the target language (p: 65).*

In the same sense, Larson (1984) pointed out that the first step in translating idioms is to be sure of the meaning of the idioms before even think in translating them. In other words, the first difficulty that the translators may encounter while translating idioms is the ability to recognize and distinguish them from ordinary expressions. However, distinguishing idiomatic from non idiomatic phrases is not always obvious. According to Baker (1992), some expressions can be easily recognized than others because they already have some features that differentiate them from other expressions, such as the violation of truth conditions i.e. to contradict reality as in throw caution to the wind and have a storm in a cup of tea. In addition to ill-formed expressions as trip the light fantastic and idioms with simile like structure as like a fish out of water. In the other cases, apart from the above mentioned, idioms can be misinterpreted because of the following reasons:

a) Some idioms have a literal meaning as well as idiomatic one. For example, expression “a slap on the face can either mean literally ‘to hit someone with the flat part

*of your hand’ or idiomatically ‘a sudden and unexpected rejection, defeat or disappointment” (Seidl and McMordie, 1988:220).*

a) The Source Language’s (SL) idiom may have a counterpart in the target language (TL) which have similar form, yet it carries a different meaning, for instance, the English expression to pull one’s leg means to play a joke on somebody by making him believe something which is not true. Whereas, its Arabic coordinate يسحب رجله [*jashabu rizlahu*] has similar form but its meaning is different ‘tricking someone into talking about something s/he would have rather kept secret. (Baker, 1992).

The second difficulty that the translator comes across after the recognition of a given idiom is how to render it in the TL, and which strategy to use. According to Baker (1992), obstacles that the translator faces when he attempts to translate idioms from one language to another differ from those s/he encounters in recognizing them. Baker, summarizes those problems as follow:

1) Some idioms in the Source Language may have no equivalent in the Target one: It is obvious that languages of different cultures differ from each other in the way of perceiving concepts and conveying them. Hence, the meaning that is expressed in one language by means of a single word may be expressed through an idiom, a fixed expression or may not exist at all in another language. Moreover, in every language there are certain expressions that are culturally bound and represent some features peculiar to that culture. Thus, their translation will be difficult or rather impossible.

2) An idiom may have similar counterpart, but different context of use in the Target language. Another kind of idioms that cause a difficulty for translators, are those that have similar equivalent in terms of the surface structure in the Target language, but they have different connotations and context of use. For example, the English expression

*to go to the dogs* (to lose one's good qualities) has a similar counterpart in German, but their context of use is different; while the English idiom can be used with both person and place, the German one is only used in connection with persons and often means to die (Baker, 1992).

3) Sometimes the source language' idiom is used in the source text with both meanings; the literal and the figurative one. In this case, the translator has to render the source language idiom by a correspondent one in both form and meaning in the target language; otherwise, the reproduction of its meaning will not be successful. Yet, this cannot be always achieved.

4) The difference between languages in terms of formality and frequency of using idioms in written discourse and contexts in which they are used is another obstacle that may hinder the process of translation. (Adapted from baker 1992)

On the basis of what has been mentioned, one may notice that idioms' translation is not an easy matter to tackle. It involves on the part of the translator not only a linguistic knowledge but a good cultural background about the two languages is also important .i.e. the lack of such knowledge is a central issue in the process of translation.

## **2.7 Baker's Taxonomy on the Strategies of translating Idioms**

To deal with the difficulties discussed above such as the lack of equivalent and differences in terms of the context of use and style, Baker (1992) proposes four main strategies as follow:

a) Translation by a total equivalence (Similar form and meaning):

This strategy involves translating the SL's idiom by an identical one in the TL that carries the same meaning and has similar form as well. the following examples are English

idiomatic expressions that are translated into Arabic using expressions with similar lexical items and meaning:

To fish in troubled water      يصطاد في المياه العكرة [jaṣṭadu fi ʔlmijahi ʔlʕakirati]

To play with fire      يلعب بالنار [jalʕabu binnar]

To throw light on      يلقي الضوء على [julqi ʔddoʔa ʕala]

Though this method seems to be the ideal strategy for translating idioms, it is difficult and “can only occasionally be achieved” (Baker 1992:72) when two culturally distinct languages are involved. Also, questions of style, register and rhetorical effect have to be taken into consideration as well.

b) Translation using Partial Equivalent (similar meaning but dissimilar form):

Another strategy that may be used for translating idioms is: translating the SL’s idiomatic expression by a TL one that conveys the same meaning but has a different form. In this method, unlike the first one, it is often possible to find a fixed expression in the TL which has similar meaning to the SL’s one, yet it consists of different lexical items. For example:

To add fuel to injury      زاد الطين بلة [zada ʔṭṭina ballatan]

On pins and needles      على أحر من الجمر [ʕala ʔaḥarra mina ʔlʕamər]

Forbidden fruit is sweetest      كل ممنوع مرغوب [kullu mamnoʕin marḡub]

c) Translation by Paraphrasing :

Paraphrasing is the most common strategy in the process of translation. It is usually used in cases where the translator fails to find a TL’s correspondent idiom to the one used in the SL, or when it seems inappropriate to use idiomatic language in the source text

because of the stylistic differences between the two languages. That is, in such cases the translator can simply use neutral terms to transmit the intended meaning behind the SL's idiom. For instance:

To live from hand to mouth      يعيش حياة الكفاف [jaʕiʃu hajata ʔlkafaf]

To let the cat out of the bag      يفشي سرا [juʃi sirran]

A hard nut to crack      مسألة مستعصية [masʔalatun mustaʕsija]

It has to be mentioned that by using this strategy, the idiomatic expressions (especially those that are culturally-bound) may lose their impact and their cultural significance.

#### b) Translation by omission:

When the meaning conveyed by the Source Language expression has no correspondent idiom in the TL and its meaning cannot be easily paraphrased, it does not harm if the translator omitted the idiom from the TL version. Baker (1992) exemplified this strategy in the following extract from the play of *Hero from Zero* (p:vi):

The Source Text: "it was bitter, but funny, to see Professor Smith had doubled his own salary before recommending the offer from Fayed and added pre-dated bonus for good measure".(p.77)

The Target Text:

"وكان من المؤسف, بل ومن المضحك, أن يتمكن بروفيسور سميث من مضاعفة راتبه مرتين قبل أن يتقدم بتوصيته لقبول عرض فايد, وان يضيف إلى ذلك مكافأة يتحدد سلفا موعد حصوله عليها" (P:77)

## 2.8 Conclusion

To sum up, in spite of the fact that idiomaticity is considered as a universal phenomenon, translators most of the time failed in reproducing idiomatic expressions from

one language to another simply because each language has its own way of expressing things; an expression in one language may not exist in another or the same meaning may be expressed differently in different languages. Additionally, most idioms are culturally bound. This what makes the process of translation much more difficult. Accordingly, theorists interested in translation studies have proposed four main strategies, mentioned earlier, which may facilitate the task for translation trainees and help them in dealing with such frozen patterns of language.

# Chapter Three

## Exploration of third year English Students' Translation of Idioms

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter aims at testing and analyzing how third year LMD students of English Department at Adrar University translate idioms from English into Arabic and what are the different difficulties they face during the process of idioms translation. It also attempts to find out whether students fail to grasp the figurative meaning of idioms and use a literal translation as we have hypothesized.

### **3.2 Data Collection and Sampling**

In order to collect data and check our hypothesis, a translation test has been especially designed for the purpose of this study. The informants are (72) seventy two third year LMD students of English Department distributed into three groups. Two students (2) have not been included in the test since they are foreigners and do not know Arabic. While 19 students of them were absent during the test session. Therefore, our analysis will be based on the results of (51) students. The selection of this population is based on the following criteria: they have already two years studying and practicing translation from English into Arabic, and they are still dealing with it; thus, they are supposed to have received basic theoretical and practical knowledge about translation.

### **3.3 Description of the Test**

The test is the appropriate technique to justify our hypothesis and reach our research objective. The use of this research instrument is motivated mainly by the aim of this study; to investigate the students' difficulties in translating idiomatic expressions from English into Arabic. It consists of fifteen English sentences that include idioms administered to fifty one (51) third year LMD students to translate them into Arabic. Idioms were selected from different sources (essential American idioms dictionary, the dictionary of English



Idioms). We tried to select the accessible and most common idioms in English that suit the students' level and make the sentences as clear and simple as possible.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

The respondents' answers were evaluated on the basis of a model answer suggested by an expert teacher at the English Department at Adrar University.

	Number of Students			Percentage %		
Number of Sentences	Correct Translation	Incorrect Translation	untranslated	Correct Translation	Incorrect Translation	Untranslated
Sentence 1	27	22	2	52.94%	43.13%	3.92 %
Sentence 2	11	36	4	21.56%	70.58 %	7.84 %
Sentence 3	21	30	0	41.17 %	58.82 %	00 %
Sentence 4	19	30	2	37.25 %	58.82 %	3.92 %
Sentence 5	46	0	4	90.19 %	00%	7.84%
Sentence 6	4	30	17	7.84%	58.82%	33.33 %
Sentence 7	10	37	4	19.6 %	72.54 %	7.84 %
Sentence 8	20	21	10	39.21 %	41.17 %	19.6 %
Sentence 9	27	20	3	52.94 %	39.21%	5.88 %
Sentence 10	39	9	3	76.47%	17.64 %	5.88%
Sentence 11	22	21	8	43.13 %	41.17 %	15.68 %
Sentence 12	18	22	10	35.92 %	43.13 %	19.6 %
Sentence 13	13	19	18	25.49 %	37.25 %	35.29 %
Sentence 14	22	26	3	43.13 %	50.98 %	5.88 %
Sentence 15	39	10	2	76.47 %	19. 60 %	3.92%

**Table 3.1: number and Percentage of Students Translation of English Idioms into**

**Arabic**

The table above summarizes the number of students and the percentage of their correct, incorrect translation of English idioms in addition to the untranslated ones. An extended analysis on each sentence in the table will be provided in the following discussion.

### 3.4.1 Sentence 1

I am not going out at this storm; it is raining cats and dogs

As far as the first sentence is concern, the expression “to rain cats and dogs” is used in English to describe a situation of raining heavily. Its Arabic equivalent is [tumṭiru biṣazara] "تمطر بغزارة" using paraphrasing strategy. The table above reveals that 52.94% (27/51) of the informants were able to recognize the expression “cats and dogs” as an idiom and translate it into Arabic in an adequate way. However, 43.13 % (22/51) of them have completely failed to infer its connotative meaning and translated it literally as [kilaabən wa qiṭaṭa] without considering the combination of the two words ‘cats and dogs’ in making the intended meaning of the whole idiom. 2 students (3.92%) left the expression without translation indicating the fact that they have not understood its real sense and how it should be translated.

### 3.4.2 Sentence 2

We wanted the party to be a surprise. Yet William spilled the beans and spoiled it.

In the second sentence, ‘to spill the beans’ means saying something that should be kept secret or private. Its appropriate translation into Arabic is "يفشي سرا" [jufəʃi sirren]. As it is shown in the table, only 11 students (21.56%) out of 51 could give a successful translation using paraphrasing which is a useful strategy when there is a lack of a direct equivalent idiom in the TL. However, the majority of them (70.58%) provide inadequate translation; some of them used literal translation to translate the English idiom ‘spilled the beans’ into Arabic. So the result was “[ʔasqa ʔa elfaʔuljaʔ] “أسقط الفاصولياء” which is

completely wrong answer. Yet the others' translation was out of context such as [ʕakkara elʒow]” “عكر الجو” simply because they have not grasp the figurative meaning of that particular idiom.

### 3.4.3 Sentence n°3

I have done my part of this project, now the ball is in your court.

The Third English Idiom “the ball is in your court” means that “it is someone’s turn or responsibility to take the action”. Its appropriate translation into Arabic is [ʔlana dawruk] "الآن دورك" using paraphrasing strategy because of the absence of a direct counterpart in Arabic.

It can be noticed from the table above that twenty one students (41.17%) have succeeded in interpreting the metaphorical meaning of the third idiom and translating it using the appropriate strategy which is paraphrasing [ʔlana dawruk] "الآن دورك". Yet, 58.82% of the students' translation was not accurate. They have translated it literally which has resulted in the production of a meaningless idiom in Arabic that is [ʔl kuratu fi malʕabik] "الكرة في ملعبك". This reflects the students' weakness in grasping and transmitting that English idiom's meaning into the TL.

### 3.4.4 Sentence n °4:

I have been so busy, only yesterday I have begun to see the day light.

The Figurative meaning of the English expression “to see the day light” is *to come at the end of a very busy time* (Rechard, 2007). It is translated best as [ʔnhajtu] "أنهيت" in Arabic. It is clear from the table above that only 37.25% (19/51) of the testers succeeded in guessing the deep meaning of the idiom and uses the appropriate strategy to render it into Arabic. While 58.82 % (30/51) of them, the majority were not able to infer its idiomatic meaning and thus their production in Arabic was meaningless. For instance, [raʔitu dawʔa

ʔnnahar] رأيت ضوء النهار, [raʔitu dawʔa ʔʃʃams] رأيت ضوء الشمس. This reflects the students' unfamiliarity with such expression and lack of knowledge about its metaphorical sense.

### 3.4.5 Sentence n° 5

Be careful with that knife! You are playing with fire.

Concerning the fifth sentence, the expression “to play with fire” means “*doing something risky or dangerous*” (Rechard, 2007). It has a similar Arabic counterpart in terms of meaning and form that is [taləʕabu binnar] "تلاعب بالنار". From the table above one can see that most students (90.19%) have succeeded in translating it into Arabic using the right strategy of translating idioms that already have an equivalent in the TL. The students' success in rendering this expression into Arabic is due to their familiarity with it, and the existence of its Arabic equivalent in both meaning and form. Despite the existence of this idiom in Arabic, (4) students (7.84%) have left it without translation.

### 3.4.6 Sentence n°6

Sally broke the ice at the auction by bidding, \$20,000 for the painting.

The idiomatic expression “to break the ice” holds a sense of “*initiating or getting something started*” (Rechard, 2007). Two main strategies can be used to translate it into Arabic. Students can either paraphrase it as [baaʕfarət or baadarə] "باشرت او بادرت" or translated it by using ‘an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form’ such as [kasarat ʔaʒiza ʔʃʃamət] "كسرت حاجز الصمت" which is the more appropriate strategy. Most students as the table reveals, failed to interpret the exact meaning of the expression. They have translated it literally as [kasarat ʔaθalʒ] "كسرت الثلج", [kasarat ʔlʒalid] "كسرت الجليد". Thus, their translation was meaningless. Moreover, 17 students (33.33%) have not translated the idiom at all while 4 students only 4 (5.7%) could give the appropriate translation.

### 3.4.7 Sentence n 7

Don't invest all your money in one company. Never put all your eggs in one basket.

The expression 'To put one's eggs in one basket' carries a metaphorical meaning that is totally different from the literal sense of its constituent words. Its figurative sense according Rechar, (2007) is "*to make everything dependent on only one thing (if the basket is dropped, all is lost*" that corresponds to the Arabic phrase [la tu3azif bikuli maladayka] "لا تجازف بكل ما لديك". The sample students' failure to interpret the exact meaning of this idiomatic expression is reflected by the high percentage of their incorrect translation shown in the table above (72.54%). They have given each single word in the expression a dictionary equivalent in Arabic rather than taking it as one unit. However, ten students only (19.6%) have been able to get the intended sense of the idiom in concern and give the right translation mentioned before, while four students (7.84%) left the expression without translation implying that they are quite unfamiliar with that idiom and its idiomatic use.

### 3.4.8 Sentence n 8

John kicks the bucket because of an accident.

As shown in the above table, only 39.21% (20/51) of the students' translation was appropriate, they have been able to figure out the intended meaning of the expression 'to kick the bucket' that is (to die) and translate it successfully into Arabic as [faaraqa alhajjat, maata or laqija hatəfaho] "فارق الحياة", "مات" او "لقي حتفه". However, 21 students have not succeeded to give the suitable rendition into the TL. Because they have not use the right strategy which is paraphrasing and translated it literally as [daraba ʔssallata, rakala ʔddaləw, rafasa ʔssallata] "ضرب السلة", "ركل الدلو", "رفس السلة". In addition, ten students have not been able to translate it. This indicates that the figurative sense of this idiom was not clear for the majority of the informants.

### 3.4.9 Sentence 9

The teacher turned a blind eye to the student who was cheating during the test.

The deep meaning of the expression 'to turn a blind eye' is "*to see something and you pretend that you haven't seen it*" (Rechard, 2007). From the table above, one might notice that an acceptable percentage (52.94%) of the testers has been able to infer the implied sense of the idiomatic expression in sentence (9) and translate it perfectly using the right strategy which is paraphrasing. This latter, is useful when there is no direct TL' idiom that corresponds to SL' one. The following are examples about the students' correct translations: [taʕaada, tazaahala, tadaahara ʔnnahuw lam jarahuw] "تغاض", "تجاهل", "تظاهر انه لم يره". Yet, (20) students have misinterpreted the intended meaning of idiom in question. Therefore, (39.21%) percent of their production has been out of context. For example, [wazəzaha nadarahu] "نظره", [nadara nadratan haadda] "نظر نظرة حادة" and [ʔamʕana ʔnnadar] "أمعن". The rest of the sample (5.88%) have not translate the expression because they have either not grasped its real meaning or ignore how it should be translated.

### 3.4.10 Sentence 10

As quick as a wind, the thief took the lady's purse.

The table (1) above asserts that (76.47%) of the students under investigation have succeeded to infer the exact meaning of the idiomatic expression 'as quick as a wind' in the tenth sentence; some of them paraphrased it into [biserʕatin kabi:ra] "بسرعة كبير". While others translate it using the most appropriate counterpart which is [biserʕati ʔlbarq] "بسرعة البرق" or [fi lamhi ʔlbaʕar] "في لمح البصر". The students' success to give the right translation is due mainly to the clear structure of this idiom and the close relation between its intended and literal sense. Though, seventy eight percent of the sample students do succeeded to translate the expression 'as quick as wind' into Arabic. There is however, a certain number (17.64%) of them who have misinterpreted it into [min duni ʕilmiha] "من دون علمها", and others (5.88%) could not translate it because of the lack of knowledge and unawareness.

### 3.4.11 Sentence 11

David is fishing in troubled waters by buying shares of that company which suffers from financial difficulties.

According to Rechar (2007) the figurative meaning of the expression 'to fish in troubled water' is "*to involve oneself in a difficult or dangerous situation, especially with a view to gaining an advantage*". Its Arabic counterpart in both meaning and form is [jəʃtaadu fi ʔlmijahi ʔʔakira] "يصطاد في المياه العكرة". The above table shows clearly that an acceptable number 22 (43.13%) of the testers were able to perfectly interpret and translate the above idiom into its exact Arabic equivalent. Yet (41.17%) of the sample students' translation was not accurate such as [jamerru bidaaʔiqa] "يمر بضائقة" [tasarraʔa] "تسرع" [mijahin ʔajeru haadiʔa] "مياه غير هادئة". Finally, 18 students have not translated it. This indicates that when the students failed to grasp the SL' idiom or misinterpreted it, they either avoid translating it or render it incorrectly in TL.

### 3.4.12 Sentence 12

Bill was upset, and your making fun of his mishap just added fuel to the fire.

In English, the expression 'to add fuel to fire' means 'to make something that is already bad too worse'. The same notion is expressed in Arabic using the metaphorical expression "يزيد الطين بلة" [jaziidu ʔʔina ballatan], it can also be translated as [juʔaʔizgu ʔl wadʔ] "يُوجج الوضع" or [jazidu hidata ʔl ʔistijaʔ] "يزيد حدة الإستهاء".

The table above shows that the high percentage of the participants (43.13%) has not succeeded in guessing the right sense of this idiom. For this reason their production in Arabic was purely literal translation of words rather than a rendition of the SL's idiom meaning such as [tudifu ʔl binzina linnar] "تضيف البنزين للنار" and [tudif ʔl waqoda linnar] "تضيف الوقود". In fact, the students' inadequate translation is caused by their unawareness and lack of knowledge concerning this sort of words combination. However 18 students only, have succeeded to provide the right interpretation of that idiom in Arabic while (19.6%) of them

did not attempt to translate at all which means that the great majority of the participants have not succeeded to figure out the exact meaning and transmit it to their mother tongue.

### 3.4.13 Sentence 13

John who is usually cautious, throw caution to the wind and went swimming in the ocean.

In fact this expression 'throw caution to the wind' does not have a corresponding Arabic functional equivalent and it is usually expressed by the two sentences " أصبح غير مبال " [ʔsbaha ʔajru mubalin] or " تخلص عن حذرہ " [taɣalla ʕan haðarih] which means to become very careless. The students' results show once again that a quite few number of the participants (13) succeeded in giving acceptable translation. This can be accounted for their ability to understand and infer the idiomatic aspect of that expression. However, 37.25% of them which represent 19 students have mistranslated it because they relied on the literal meaning of words rather than their figurative side. Accordingly, most of their production in Arabic was [rama ʔlhaðara lirrih] " رمى الحذر للريح " and one of them translated it as [rama ʔrajata baʕidan] " رمى " الراهية بعيدا which is out of context. The remaining students (18) have kept the expression without translation.

### 3.4.14 Sentence 14

He promises us to help and he was able to keep his word.

Twenty two students (43.13%) out of fifty one have successfully rendered the expression 'to keep his word' into Arabic which means that they had no difficulty in tracing and translating it in a suitable way. Some of their correct translations were as follow: [wafa biwaʕədih] " وفى بوعده " [ħafida waʕədah] " حفظ وعده " and [kaana ʕinda ʕahdih] " كان عند وعده ". While 26 students (50.98%) have misinterpreted it into [katama sirrahu] " كتم سره ", [ħafada kalimatahu] " حفظ كلمته " and [ʔaɣlafa waʕdah] " أخلف وعده ". An explanation of such kind of translation is that the greater the learners' ignorance of the real meaning of the SL' idiom, the greater the chance for confusion and mistranslation will be. Finally, three students (5.88%)



only have not attempt to translate because of their failure to get the actual sense of the expression in concern.

### 3.4.15 Sentence 15

After ten years of work, Steve is now at the top of the tree

The final expression 'at the top of the tree' means "*to be at the high position or rank in a career*" (Rechard, 2007). This idiom unlike the previous one has been grasped by the great majority of the informants. 74.50% of them have been able to get the right translation suggested in the model which is [waşala ʔila ʔlqima] "وصل إلى القمة" whereas 9 students have not make any effort to produce better translation. They adapt literal translation in which each word in English has its Arabic dictionary equivalent as [waşala ʔila qimmati ʔ[ʃʒarati] "وصل إلى قمة الشجرة" and one of them have misinterpreted into [ʔaşbaha ʃaaʔilan] "أصبح عاطلاً". Thus, the result was 10 (19.60%) incorrect translations. The remaining (2) students have not attempt to translate the expression at all.

## 3.5 Summary of the Findings

The results obtained from data analysis show that, some students of English at Adrar University really find considerable difficulties in guessing the appropriate meaning of the idiomatic expressions and producing intelligible version in the TL. Most idioms were either rendered erroneously or left without translation. This is due in the first place to the students' unfamiliarity with such expressions and their metaphorical use. Furthermore, meaning can be considered as the main leading cause to failure in achieving the appropriate translation of a given idiom in the TL since it has nothing to do with the individual words meanings. Additionally, most of the investigated learners' translations demonstrate the following:

- The students' weak knowledge in respect to idiomatic expressions in both languages.
- Their ignorance of the different translation strategies that might be helpful in achieving a successful rendition in the TL and finally, the students' lack of proficiency and experience in dealing with idiomatic expressions.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

In a nutshell, this chapter has shed light on the translation of idiomatic expressions done by 3<sup>rd</sup> year students of the English Department at Adrar University in order to measure their capacity to understand and translate English idioms into Arabic. The above findings show that idioms are, to some extent, problematic to our testers. In most sentences, students have neither been able to infer the metaphorical meaning of the idioms nor have they chosen the right strategy to translate them into Arabic. Consequently, most of their translations were inadequate.

## **General Conclusion**

The present research has been conducted to examine the capacity of 3<sup>rd</sup> year students in translating English idioms into Arabic. To reach this objective we have gone through two main theoretical parts to pave the ground to the experimental work. In the first theoretical part we have attempted to spot light on some basic concepts in translation mainly its definition, different types and problems that translators may encounter during the process of translation.

The second part on the other hand, provided a general overview on idiomatic expressions in relation to the area of translation with an emphasis on the different problems encountered by translators when dealing with such fixed expressions with a number some suggested strategies to solve them.

In the practical part, students were given fifteen English sentences that contain idiomatic expressions to be translated into Arabic. The results obtained have shown that students' ability to understand and interpret English idioms is very limited. They encountered difficulty in the two stages of the translation process: in interpreting the idioms' intended meaning and finding the right equivalent in the TL. This latter is due to the students' lack of proficiency and practice. In addition, they have confirmed our hypothesis and reveal that, except the literal translation of words, students' use of the other translation strategies is limited as well.

Based on the findings of this study, we might end up with the following recommendations:

Students should be exposed more and more to idiomatic expressions at schools and University to extend their knowledge. Moreover, having a good cultural background about fixed expressions in general, and idioms in particular can help students in getting the true meaning behind idioms and enable them to find the TL equivalent that has the same meaning and function of the SL expression.

They should be made aware that literal translation is not always good strategy for good translation especially when dealing with fixed expressions.

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# Appendix

## Appendix

### Students' translation Test

**Dear Students,**

This test is used as a data collection instrument for my research project translation'. So, you are kindly asked to translate the following sentences from English into Arabic. Your participation is of great importance, I will be grateful if you give full attention when translating

- 1) I am not going out in that storm; It is raining cats and dogs.

.....

- 2) We wanted the party to be a surprise. Yet William spilled the beans and spoiled it.

.....

- 3) I have done my part of this project. Now the ball is in your court.

.....

- 4) I have been so busy, only yesterday I have begun to see the day light.

.....

- 5) Be careful with that knife! You are playing with fire.

.....

- 6) Sally broke the ice at the auction by bidding \$20,000 for the painting.

.....

- 7) Do not invest all your money in one company. Never put all your eggs in one basket.

.....

- 8) John kicks the bucket because of an accident.

.....

- 9) The teacher turned a blind eye to the student who was cheating during the test.

.....



10) As quick as a wind, the thief took the lady's purse.

.....

11) David is fishing in troubled waters by buying shares of that company which suffers  
From financial difficulties

.....

12) Bill was upset, and your making fun of his mishap just added fuel to the fire.

.....

13) John who is usually cautions, throw caution to the wind and went swimming in the  
Ocean

.....

14) He promises us to help and he was able to keep his word.

.....

15) After ten years of work, Steve is now at the top of the tree.

.....