



مجلة العلوم الإنسانية

علمية محكمة - نصف سنوية

Journal of Human Sciences

تصدرها كلية الآداب / الخمس

جامعة المرقب. ليبيا

Al - Marqab University- Faculty of
Arts- alkhomes

28

العدد

الثامن

والعشرون

مارس 2024م

تصنيف الرقم الدولي (2710-3781/ISSI)

رقم الإيداع القانوني بدار الكتب الوطنية (2021/55)

Translating Libyan and Arabic Proverbs: Across-Cultural Study on Linguistic and Cultural Challenges in Arabic Translation into English

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Abstract

proverbs are a widely spread phenomenon. Translating proverbs necessitates more than just direct word-for-word substitution. It requires understanding the underlying message, symbolism, cultural references and context of the proverb in order to convey its intended meaning in the target language. This paper sheds light on translating Arabic and Libyan proverbs by the seventh semester students at the Department of English in Tripoli University . It starts with introducing the definitions of translation, culture and proverbs. Then, it presents a translation test to know how students translate proverbs within texts and to identify the problems they face in this respect. Finally, it summarizes the findings of the test which show that the students at the Department of English encounter some difficulties in translating Arabic and Libyan proverbs into English. These difficulties include the insufficient knowledge about both cultures and the use of improper translation techniques and strategies were key factors contributed to the unsuccessful translation.

Key words: Arabic, Libyan, translation, proverbs, culture, model

translation.

Introduction

Translation scholars looked at translation from different perspectives. For instance, Newmark (2001) illustrates translation as "rendering the meaning of a text into another language in the way that author intended the text". According to Nida and Taber (1969:12), "translation consists of producing in the target language the closest natural equivalent of the source language message, firstly with respect to meaning and secondly with respect to style." Translation has been regarded as an integral part of cross-cultural communication and has played a crucial role in bridging global linguistic and cultural divides. However, translating proverbs from one language to another presents a multitude of challenges, both language and culture-bound. Because Arabic and English are not from the same family, translation becomes difficult when translating from Arabic into English or vice versa, let alone translating proverbs. Translating Libyan and Arabic proverbs is not an easy task. We need to be familiar with the translation techniques and the cultural components of the two languages as well in order to be able to bridge the cultural gap between the two different languages when translating Libyan and Arabic proverbs into English. Translating proverbs is very challenging because proverbs are fixed, unchanged

expressions and cannot be understood as it has a figurative meaning. Translation scholars and linguists defined proverbs differently. For example, Taggart argues that "a proverb is a piece of wisdom ." (2009). "Like idioms, proverbs are special, fixed, unchanged phrases which have special, fixed unchanged meanings ," as Ghazala explains. (1995). In this study, we will be exploring the challenges encountered in translating Libyan and Arabic proverbs into English, looking at the ways in which different cultural contexts, linguistic understandings, and other contextual factors can affect translation.

Literature Review

Cultural issues that may affect translation have been discussed by many researchers; such as Baker (1992) and Newmark (1988). Their views are summarized as following:

- 1- Ecological culture because of the differences between Arabic and English in terms of climate, animals, plants.
- 2- Religion culture because in the Middle East religion has a greater influence on the culture compared to the Western world.
- 3- Social culture because of the differences between Arabic and English in attitudes of people towards love, marriage among other things.
- 4- Material culture as a result of the differences in concepts used in the East and the West because they use different types of food, costumes and transport ...etc.

Several studies have been conducted on proverbs. For instance, Sameer (2016) analyzed English proverbs related to specific types of animals and compared them with their Arabic equivalents. The study focused on proverbs related to horses and dogs, employing a model based on three approaches: Hsieh (2006), Sperber and Wilson (1986), and Lakoff and Turner (1989). These approaches were used to understand the meaning of the proverbs and identify their cultural background. Sameer (2016) explored the relevance theory of notion enrichment to derive the implicature of these proverbs in his work. The study also examined the conceptual and grammatical motivations and utilized cognitive linguistics to explore the metonymy and metaphors evident in these proverbs. The study sample consisted of 20 proverbs in English and Arabic, with the Arabic proverbs taken from the book 'Mojamah Al.Amtal' by the author Abu-fadhel Al Meidani. A qualitative approach was employed in the study. The study concluded that proverbs in both languages conveyed the same meaning, metaphor, mental mechanism, and metonymy. The researcher also discovered that proverbs containing dog expressions carried negative connotations, while proverbs with horses represented noble and positive connotations.

In addition, Al-Azzam (2017) investigated the cultural constraints in translating Jordanian proverbs into English. The study emphasized the folkloric, colloquial, and social usage of proverbs and examined

the cultural and social aspects of these proverbs by comparing them to socio-cultural values. Al-Azzam provided the historical background of the studied proverbs, including the actual events, frequency, and usage. The sample used in Al-Azzam's study consisted of 8 Jordanian proverbs, and a descriptive approach was employed to achieve the study's goals. The study revealed that translating Jordanian proverbs into English encountered various challenges, particularly with regard to cultural aspects. Moreover, the colloquial nature of Jordanian proverbs made their translation challenging, as it often led to the omission of the proverbs' social, semantic, and cultural values.

Culture and Translation

Translation and culture are closely related. Translation involves the transfer of meaning from one language into another and this process is influenced by cultural factors. Culture refers to the beliefs, values, customs and practices of a particular group of people. These cultural factors can affect the way that language is used and understood. It is important to bear in mind the cultural context of the source text and the target audience.

Different translation scholars have different approaches regarding translating texts that include cultural items. (Larson,1984), for example, keeps both cultures in mind, approaching cultural

translation in terms of the way the translator helps the receptor audience understand the content and intent of the source document. According to (Newmark,1998), when a translator encounters a text with highly cultural elements, it is worth taking into account the cultures of both the source text and the target text, and finding an appropriate technique for delivering the message of the meaning of the source text. This means that translators must act as a mediator between the two cultures, since they are not dealing with only two languages. Therefore, Newmark argues that the literal translation of culturally specific words within a text is not the translator's best option. In order to avoid inaccurate translation "may include an appropriate descriptive-functional equivalent" (Newmark,1998:95). Translation scholars studies have used different terms to express their understanding of words that are in a particular source language and culture but have no equivalent in the target language culture. For instance, according to Newmark (1998:96), "a cultural word" means that the receiver of the translated text cannot understand this word if it is translated literally. Baker argues that a cultural concept may be "abstract or concrete; it may relate to a religious belief, a social custom, or even a type of food."

Definition of proverbs

Different translation scholars defined proverbs differently. Perhaps the most comprehensive definition of the proverb is given by Norrick (1985:31), who defines proverbs as "eloquent, self-

contained traditional expressions with didactic content and consistent poetic form". Meider (2008:11) highlights that the use of figures of speech, mainly metaphor, is a key characteristic in most proverbs: "A proverb is a short, generally known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, morals and traditional view in a metaphorical, fixed and memorable form and which is handed down from generation to generation". Taggart (2009: 19) argues that a proverb is "a piece of wisdom or advice, expressed in a short or memorable way".

General principles for translating proverbs

Many scholars have studied the different possible methods of translating proverbs.

When translating proverbs, Nida suggests that translators should focus the underlying concepts and values rather than trying to find exact equivalents for individual words or phrases. This may involve adopting the proverb to fit the cultural context of the target language or even creating a new proverb that conveys the same message in a way that is more familiar to the target audience. Baker suggests in her book "In Other Words" four strategies for translating proverbs and idioms :

- 1- Identify the idiom and its meaning in the source language.
- 2- Determine the closest equivalent idiom in the target language.

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- 3- Consider the cultural and linguistic context of the idiom in both languages.
 - 4- Decide whether to translate the idiom literally or to use a more creative approach, such as paraphrasing or omitting the idiom together.

Data Collection and Analysis

This part is devoted to the approaches used in data collection and analysis, shedding light on research methodology, participants and their background, qualitative and quantitative analysis.

Research Methodology

This study is carried out in Tripoli University, Libya to examine the ability of translating Libyan and standard Arabic proverbs into English by the seventh-semester students of translation at the Translation Department. To collect data for this study, a translation test was designed to test eleven students in translating proverbs. The test consisted of fourteen standard Arabic and Libyan proverbs within contexts to be translated into English. The first seven standard Arabic proverbs have been chosen from a book entitled 'Encyclopedia of Standard Arabic Proverbs' by Mostafa Fathi (2013). While the other seven Libyan ones have been selected from a book entitled 'Glimpses of the Libyan Heritage' by Elmesmari (2011). Proverbs are given to eleven students to be translated into English. The students were selected randomly from a total population of thirty five students studying at the seventh-semester due to availability and time constraints. To analyze the data collected, both quantitative and qualitative approaches are used. The following is an analysis of the data:

Data Analysis

In the quantitative data analysis, students' translations were compared to a modal translation translated by an experienced professional translator and interpreter and works as a teaching staff member at the Translation Department in Tripoli University, to decide whether the translation is acceptable or not. Table one below shows the proverbs used in the test and their modal translations.

The following table shows the Libyan and Arabic proverbs used in the tests and their modal translations:

No	Arabic Proverb	TT Modal Translation
1	حافظ على عمل الخير وإن كان قليل فإنه إن تمشي وتدوم خير من أن تعدو ولا تقوم.	Steady but slow wins the race.
2	لا تأمن من خاتك مرة فلا يلسع المؤمن من جحر مرتين.	A fox is not taken twice to the same snare.
3	لا تكن جشعاً وارض بما كتب الله لك فإنما تقطع أعناق الرجال المطامع.	Grasp all lose all.
4	قم على أداء واجبك بنفسك فما حك ظهرك مثل ظفرك.	If you want a thing well done, do it yourself.
5	التأجيل لص الزمان فلا تؤخر عمل اليوم إلى الغد.	Make hay while the sun shines.

6	دع البكاء على مآسي الماضي فقد سبق السيف العذل.	It is too late.
7	بعد أن فالمصائب لا تأتي كثررت ديونه مرضت زوجته فرادى	When it rains, it pours.

Table.No.1

No	Libyan Proverb	TT Modal Translation
8	ذهبوا جميعهم للصيد ولم يرجعوا إلا بسمكة واحدة الجنازة كبيرة والميت فار	A storm in a teacup
9	سألني صديقي "هل ستشتري سيارة عندما تتخرج من الجامعة" فأجبته "دعني أخرج وعندها سأقرر" غير يولد ويسموه.	Don't count your chicken before they are hatched.
10	حاولت إقناعه مراراً وتكراراً بأن القاهرة هي عاصمة مصر ولكنه أصر على رأيه. عنز ولو طارت.	A willful man must have his way.
11	ينصحنى بزيارة أصدقائي وهو لا يزور أصدقائه. الجمل مايشوفش عوج رقبتة.	Put your own house in order.

12	الاستمرار أحد عوامل النجاح وكما يقول المثل الدوام يبيد الرخام.	constant dropping wears away the stone.
13	الوقت سيكشف لنا الحقيقة لأن المتغطي بالأيام عريان.	Time will tell.
14	نصحته ولم يستمع لي، فمن الآن وصاعداً، لن أقدم له النصيحة. اللي تلقاه راكب فوق جريدة قوله مبروك الحصان.	Good luck to him.

a- Chart Tables for Analyzing Students' Data in Translating Arabic Proverbs

Table No. 2

1- حافظ على عمل الخير وإن كان قليل فإنه إن تمشي وتدوم خير من أن تعدو ولا تقوم.

Subjects	Mistranslation	No translation	literal	Free
1	√			
2			√	
3		√		
4	√			
5			√	
6		√		
7	√			
8		√		
9			√	
10			√	
11		√		

Percentage	28%	36%	36%	0%
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As observed in Table No. 2, three subjects mistranslated the proverb due to their lack of competence in the source language (SL) and difficulty in understanding the meaning. For example, Subject No. 4 translated the proverb as "step by step," while four subjects translated it literally, resulting in nonsensical sentences. None of the subjects opted for a free translation.

Table.No.3

2- لا تأمن من خالك مرة فلا يلسع المؤمن من جحر مرتين.

Subjects	Mistranslation	No translation	Literal	Free
1				√
2	√			
3		√		
4		√		
5				√
6		√		
7				√
8				√
9	√			
10			√	
11				√
Percentage	18%	28%	9%	45%

It is evident that nearly half of the subjects opted for free translation, while others mistranslated the proverb due to issues with understanding. For instance, Subject No. 2 translated the proverb as "do not believe the liars," and Subject No. 10 employed literal translation, rendering it as "the same human does not fall into the same hole again.

Table.No.4

3- لا تكن جشعاً وارض بما كتب الله لك فإنما تُقَطِّعُ أعناق الرجال المطامع.

Subjects	Mistranslation	No translation	Literal	Free
1	√			
2				√
3		√		
4				√
5				√
6			√	
7				√
8		√		
9	√			
10			√	
11	√			
percentage	28%	18%	18%	36%

It is evident that three subjects mistranslated the proverb, while four subjects opted for free translation. Additionally, two subjects chose literal translation, which resulted in nonsensical sentences. For example, Subject No. 6 translated the proverb as "the neck of the greedy men can be cut."

Table.No.5

4- قم على أداء واجبك بنفسك_ فما حك ظهرك مثل ظفرك.

Subjects	Mistranslation	No translation	Literal	Free
1				√
2	√			
3		√		
4		√		
5				√
6			√	
7				√
8				√
9				√
10	√			
11	√			
Percentage	28%	18%	9%	45%

As observed in Table No. 4, half of the subjects opted for free translation, resulting in acceptable translations. However, three subjects mistranslated the proverb due to their limited proficiency in the target language. For instance, Subject No. 10 translated it as "do homework self by self," and Subject No. 6 employed literal translation, rendering it as "nothing will scratch your back like your nails.

Table.No.6

5- التأجيل لص الزمان فلا تؤخر عمل اليوم إلى الغد.

Subjects	Mistranslation	No translation	Literal	Free
1				√
2	√			
3				√
4		√		
5				√
6	√			
7				√
8		√		
9	√			
10	√			
11				√
Percentage	37%	18%	0%	45%

Regarding Table No. 6, half of the students employed the appropriate technique (Free translation), while the remaining students mistranslated the proverb due to their insufficient proficiency in both languages and cultures. For example, Subject No. 10 translated it as "make everything on its time.

Table.No.7

6- دع البكاء على مآسي الماضي فقد سبق السيف العذل.

Subjects	Mistranslation	No translation	Literal	Free
1			√	
2	√			
3				√
4		√		
5	√			
6				√
7				√
8			√	
9	√			
10		√		
11	√			
Percentage	36%	18%	18%	28%

It is evident that most students mistranslated the proverb due to their limited linguistic and cultural competence. For example, Subject No. 2 translated it as "don't think about the past." Only three students opted for free translation.

Table.No.8

7- بعد ان كثرت ديونه مرضت زوجته فالمصائب لا تأتي فرادى.

Subjects	Mistranslation	No translation	Literal	Free
1		√		
2				√
3	√			
4		√		
5				√
6			√	
7				√
8				√
9				√
10	√			
11				√
Percentage	18%	18%	9%	55%

As observed in Table No. 8, the majority of students translated this proverb correctly using free translation. However, some students mistranslated it due to their limited proficiency in the source language. For instance, Subject No. 2 translated it as "dilemmas don't come together," and only one student opted for literal translation, as seen in Subject No. 6's translation of "the crisis do not come individually.

b- Chart Tables for Analyzing Students' Data in Translating Libyan Proverbs

Table.No.9

8- ذهبوا جميعهم للصيد ولم يرجعوا إلا بسمكة واحدة الجنازة كبيرة والميت فار

Subjects	Mistranslation	No translation	Literal	Free
1	√			
2		√		
3		√		
4		√		
5			√	
6		√		
7			√	
8		√		
9	√			
10		√		
11				√
Percentage	18%	55%	18%	9%

As observed in Table No. 9, only one student opted for free translation, while two students chose literal translation, resulting in mistranslations. For example, Subject No. 7 translated it as "big funeral and the dead is a mouse." Additionally, two students mistranslated the proverb, with Subject No. 9 translating it as "the done effort is great for something is waste." Furthermore, some students did not translate it at all.

Table.No.10

9- سألني صديقي "هل ستشتري سيارة عندما تتخرج من الجامعة" فأجبته "دعني أخرج وعندها سأقرر" غير يولد ويسموه".

Subjects	Mistranslation	No translation	Literal	Free
1			√	
2				√
3		√		
4		√		
5			√	
6			√	
7	√			
8		√		
9	√			
10		√		
11				√
Percentage	18%	36%	28%	18%

It is evident that only two students translated the proverb correctly using free translation. However, three students opted for literal translation, resulting in mistranslations. For example, Subject No. 5 translated it as "let the born is arriving." Furthermore, two students mistranslated the proverb due to difficulties in understanding, such as Subject No. 9, who translated it as "wait for dough to be matured." Additionally, four subjects did not translate the proverb at all.

Table.No.11

10- حاولت إقناعه مراراً وتكراراً بأن القاهرة هي عاصمة مصر ولكنه أصر على رأيه.
عنز ولو طارت.

subjects	Mistranslation	No translation	Literal	Free
1		√		
2		√		
3		√		
4		√		
5	√			
6			√	
7	√			
8		√		
9	√			
10	√			
11	√			
percentage	45%	45%	10%	0%

It is obvious that none of the students translated this proverb correctly. Half of the students misunderstood the proverb, with Subject No. 9 translating it as "he puts salt in water." Additionally, the remaining students did not translate it at all.

Table.No.12

11- ينصحي بزيارة أصدقائي وهو لا يزور أصدقائه. الجمل مايشوفش عوج رقبتة.

subjects	Mistranslation	No translation	Literal	Free
1	√			
2				√
3			√	
4		√		
5				√
6			√	
7			√	
8	√			
9				√
10		√		
11				√
percentage	18%	18%	28%	36%

Regarding Table No. 12, four students translated the proverb correctly using free translation. However, three students opted for literal translation, resulting in mistranslations. For example, Subject No. 3 translated it as "the camel does not see its neck." Additionally, two students misunderstood the proverb and translated it incorrectly. Subject No. 8 translated it as "do not judge on me." Furthermore, two students did not translate the proverb at all.

Table.No.13

12- الاستمرار أحد عوامل النجاح وكما يقول المثل الدوام يبيد الرخام.

subjects	Mistranslation	No translation	Literal	Free
1			√	
2		√		
3		√		
4		√		
5	√			
6		√		
7				√
8		√		
9				√
10	√			
11	√			
percentage	28%	45%	9%	18%

As observed in Table No. 13, only two students translated the proverb properly using free translation. One student opted for literal translation. However, three students mistranslated the proverb, resulting in nonsensical sentences. For example, Subject No. 5 translated it as "one step arrives us thousand steps." Additionally, the remaining students did not translate the proverb.

Table.No.14

13- الوقت سيكشف لنا الحقيقة لأن المتغطي بالأيام عريان.

Subjects	Mistranslation	No translation	Literal	Free
1		√		
2	√			
3		√		
4		√		
5	√			
6			√	
7	√			
8		√		
9	√			
10		√		
11				√
Percentage	37%	45%	9%	9%

It is evident that only one student translated the proverb correctly, while another student chose literal translation, resulting in an incorrect translation. For example, Subject No. 6 translated it as "which covered by days is not covering." Additionally, four students mistranslated the proverb due to their limited competence in both cultures. Subject No. 7 translated it as "lying won't help." On the other hand, the remaining half of the students did not translate the proverb.

Table.No.15

14- نصحته ولم يستمع لي، فمن الآن وصاعداً، لن أقدم له النصيحة. اللي تلقاه راكب فوق جريدة قوله مبروك الحصان.

subjects	Mistranslation	No translation	Literal	Free
1		√		
2	√			
3		√		
4		√		
5	√			
6		√		
7		√		
8	√			
9	√			
10		√		
11	√			
percentage	45%	55%	0%	0%

It is evident that none of the students translated this proverb correctly. Half of them did not even attempt to translate it, while the others mistranslated it due to their limited competence in both languages. Consequently, they produced nonsensical sentences, such as Subject No. 8's translation of "say yes and then the tea will be served.

Comparison between Arabic and Libyan Proverb Translations

Most students fail to properly translate Libyan proverbs. They face difficulties in transferring them due to their insufficient knowledge of both languages and rely solely on literal translation as their technique. Proverbs are an integral part of culture, so when translating between two different cultures, translators should not rely on literal translation. Translating Arabic proverbs, in particular, poses several challenges due to the inherent cultural and linguistic differences between the two languages. It is evident that most students encounter fewer problems when translating Arabic proverbs compared to Libyan ones.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Having analyzed the data above, the researchers concluded that most students failed to achieve equivalence and employ the correct technique in translation. The poor performance of the students in the test was a result of both literal translation and cultural influence. Insufficient knowledge about both cultures and the use of improper translation techniques and strategies were key factors contributing to the unsuccessful translation. Additionally, cultural differences between Libyan and Arabic countries and English-speaking countries can pose challenges in accurately capturing the nuances

and context of proverbs. Proverbs often carry cultural, historical, or metaphorical meanings specific to a particular society, which may not easily translate into another language. Lastly, it is important to remember that translation is an ongoing process that requires continuous practice, exposure, and improvement. With guidance and support, students can gradually develop their translation abilities and produce more accurate renditions of Libyan and Arabic proverbs into English.

Recommendations

Based on the findings obtained from the study, the researchers propose the following recommendations:

- 1- Strengthen Cultural Understanding: Provide students with ample opportunities to improve their knowledge and understanding of the cultural nuances and context of both languages. This can be achieved through cultural immersion programmes, exposure to authentic materials and discussion about cultural differences and perspectives.
- 2- Enhancing Language Proficiency: Develop strategies to enhance students' proficiency in both English and Arabic languages focusing on vocabulary, grammar and idiomatic expressions, and encouraging consistent practice in reading, writing, listening and speaking to improve language skills.

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- 3- Providing translation techniques: offer comprehensive training on various translation techniques and strategies. Teach students how to appropriately adopt phrases, idioms and cultural references from Arabic into English or vice versa, striving for equivalence while maintaining clear communication.

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