

The Cultural Differences in translating Idioms in Charlotte Brontë's "Jane Eyre"

الاختلافات الثقافية في ترجمة التعابير الاصطلاحية في رواية جين إير لشارلوت برونتي

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Abstract:

Idioms are the most common way to express hidden meanings, giving them a special feature or imaginary touch, for they are what characterize one culture from another. In some languages, idioms include proverbs, rhetoric expressions, allegorical saying, allusion, etc. English-Arabic bilingual history is long, which creates a large amount of different idioms. Therefore, idioms translation does not only hold meanings, but also conveys cultural characteristics and information. This paper discusses translating idioms and the cultural difficulties that face it, and the equivalence of English and Arabic idioms, using Charlotte Brontë's, "Jane Eyre" in both its English and Arabic versions as a corpus.

Keywords: idioms, translation, culture, Jane Eyre, source language, target language.

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الملخص:

تعد التعبيرات الاصطلاحية الطريقة الأكثر شيوعاً للتعبير عن معاني خفية، مما يمنحها سمة خاصة أو لمسة خيالية، لأنها هي ما يميز ثقافة عن أخرى. وفي بعض اللغات، تشمل التعابير الاصطلاحية الأمثال، والمحسنات اللفظية والبديعية والبلاغية، المجازية، وما إلى ذلك. تاريخ ثنائية اللغة الإنجليزية-العربية طويل، مما يخلق كمية كبيرة من التعبيرات الاصطلاحية المختلفة.

وبالتالي، لا تحمل ترجمة التعبيرات الاصطلاحية المعاني فقط، بل تنقل أيضًا الخصائص والمعلومات الثقافية. تتناول هذه الورقة البحثية ترجمة التعبيرات الاصطلاحية والصعوبات الثقافية التي تواجهها، والتكافؤ بينها في الإنجليزية والعربية، باستخدام رواية جين إير لشارلوت برونتي، نسختها الإنجليزية والعربية أنموذجًا.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تعبيرات اصطلاحية، ترجمة، ثقافة، جين إير، لغة المصدر، لغة الهدف.

INTRODUCTION:

Language is the mirror of culture, because it reflects culture and is influenced by it at the same time. Translation is one of the effective ways to understand languages easily and perceive cultures clearly. It is, however, one of the most difficult areas within the field of language studies. In order to achieve a good translation, the translator should have enough knowledge about both the SL (source language) and the TL (target language). They should also possess a vast vocabulary in both languages to master the ST (source text) and TT (target text). One of the ways of enriching vocabulary is studying idioms or idiomatic expressions in order to produce a translation that looks natural because not all texts can be translated word-for-word.

It is known that idioms are products of cultures. They are an important part of the language and culture of a society. Since there are many differences in localities, life experiences, history, traditions, religious beliefs, literature, etc. it is hard to include in a translated text all the components of both external meanings and deep implications and cultural features. Thus, while translating idioms, the translator has to deal appropriately with two kinds of contradiction, between two different languages and two different cultures.

Every language has its own idioms, a special kind of expression that has developed within the language. As an important part of every language, idioms are their jewels, which have been described as the crystallization of human intelligence and wisdom. Therefore, to understand a language, one has to understand its idioms and the strategies and theories concerning their translation.

English and Arabic, as two vast and important languages in the world, are very rich in idioms. These two languages are totally different from each other both linguistically and culturally. Thus, their idioms are different also. This paper provides a comparative study between English and Arabic idioms. It mentions the cultural turn in translating idioms and the cultural problems that face the process. It also presents theoretical views on idiom translation, in addition to their translation strategies. The study refers to Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre and its Arabic

translation. Comparing the idioms in both versions offers both languages (English-Arabic) a fruitful area of study, and perhaps solves some problems concerning cultural translation.

1. English and Arabic:

English and Arabic are two different languages very distinct from each other linguistically and culturally. Arabic is a Semitic language which belongs to the Afro-Asiatic family, and it is closely related to Hebrew and ancient Aramaic¹. It is ranked, according to some surveys, as the world's sixth most widely used language. It is the official language of most countries in the Middle East, such as Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Syria and North Africa like Egypt, Algeria and Tunisia.

On the other hand, English is certainly the most required language in the world. It has been recognized in England since about 400 A.D. it spread to the New World and, in time, to all corners of the British overseas empire. After Chinese and Hindi, English is the third largest global language. English is classified as a West Germanic language brought to Britain by a wave of migration by Germanic tribes from what is present- day Northwest Germany².

For centuries, many comparative studies have been done between English and Arabic. Thus, both languages are characterized by different features. Many scholars have identified a set of cultural and linguistic differences, such as the conciseness and clarity of English versus the indirectness and symbolism of Arabic³.

2. English and Arabic: Linguistic Overview:

As some linguists have said, as a general rule, "an idiomatic phrase cannot be altered"⁴. This means that words cannot be replaced or randomly re-arranged in idioms because they commonly consist of artistic devices to make the content rich and colorful. As has been said, English and Arabic are different from each other, both linguistically and culturally. Linguistically, Arabic is a Semitic language that depends on verbs made up of three consonants (the triconsonantal root)⁵, such as كتب، جلس. It also depends on inflections to determine case, gender and number. Its sound system is completely different from English, and its pronunciation includes a variety of distinctive guttural harsh sounds that are formed in a different way than most sounds in English (ظ، غ، خ...). Arabic grammar, however, is relatively straightforward. There are only two verb tenses and verbs are regular in conjugation. Additionally, the Arabic writing system is quite different from the English one. Arabic vowels are indicated by marks above and below the consonants. These marks play the role of vowels in English.

On the other hand, English is an Indo-European language that is partially inflectional and highly word-order dependent⁶. It also differentiates between spoken and written language. However, the written language may contain some spoken words and sentences depending on the register and the genre the language is addressed to. As has been mentioned before, the English sound system is different from Arabic, since English contains softer sounds. Its grammar is also entirely different, as it has various tenses and verbs that are not always regular in conjugation.

3. English and Arabic: Cultural Overview:

With regard to translation between English and Arabic the translator must sometimes deal with texts that contain proverbs, verses, historical events, folktales, etc. that are related only to a specific culture. In addition, they must consider the natural difficulties in understanding the cultural contexts of worlds with completely different tastes and principles, such as the English and the Arab worlds. Therefore, when translating between different cultures the translator should bear in mind that they are conveying a message from the source culture to the target culture.

English and Arabic are spoken by nations that are geographically, religiously and socially distant. Arabic belongs to an area of hot and dry climate, whereas English belongs mostly to an area of cold and wet climate. Most English-speaking nations are Christian, whereas most Arabic countries are Muslim. Thus, the translator should take seriously into consideration the ecological conditions and the religious differences.

Some English expressions are associated with warm weather to express favorable connotations of joy and pleasure to English people, like the idiom: "this news warms my heart" or "he is warm-hearted". This idiom as a matter of fact, conveys happy news if we relate it to the environment of the English nations; however, it is not as delighting for hot Arabic countries. Therefore, the ecological equivalent in Arabic is "هذا الخبر أثلج صدري", because this idiom matches the Arabs' weather better. Consequently, the cultural dimension is very significant when two languages are involved in any type of interaction⁷

4. Idioms as a Translation Problem:

The differences between cultures may cause more severe complications for the translator than the differences in language structure. Misunderstanding in translation is often caused by the translator's preconceptions about the reality of the SL community. These beliefs deserve a special attention from the translator in order not to create any problems or misunderstandings in either the SL or the TL.

Idioms and cultural expressions are considered as translation problems that challenge the translator. Idioms are treated as figures of speech such as similes, but are categorized as multi-word expressions which are called "units" in the text. Hence, idioms should not be translated according to their individual elements, because this will not give the correct meaning of the expression. As Baker (1992:63) mentions, idioms are "frozen patterns of language... often carry meanings which cannot be deduced from their individual components". Idioms are often classified as a type of fixed expression that includes proverbs, allusions, idiomatic similes, catchphrases, etc. As a result, idioms have three main characteristics: they are non-substitutable, composed of more than one word and semantically frozen⁸.

Idioms are not easy to translate. It is sometimes hard to find the right equivalent for a sequence of words that conveys one specific meaning. Problems of idiom translation are divided into different types. First, idioms may express a sense that does not occur in the TL, which makes it difficult to find an equivalence in the TL. Thus, the translation of idioms depends on understanding the context. Second, the translator may find the equivalence in the TL but the situation in which the idiom is used may be different in the two languages. Another problem in translating idioms is that the frequency and the formality of idioms differ from one language to another.

To deal with these difficulties scholars have proposed a group of solutions that the translator can use to write a more comprehensible text that serves both the SL and the TL. Among these solutions are: translating with an identical TL equivalent; translating with a non-identical TL equivalent that conveys the same meaning; paraphrasing the idiom even if it risks losing the stylistic impact of the idiom; or finally deleting the idiom totally⁹.

5. The translatability of idioms in Jane Eyre:

5.1. Jane Eyre:

Jane Eyre is a thirty-eight chapters novel, published in 1847 that brought a great fame to its author. In a time when women were prevented from writing and publishing, the clergyman's daughter, Charlotte Brontë, broke down that rule and became famous with one of the most fascinating novels in the world of English literature. Jane Eyre is an unloved orphan sent to a grueling school, Lowood, by her foster aunt who dislikes her. She emerges as a

solemnly quiet person, and then accepts a job as a governess for a young girl. In that house she carries on her life which starts changing more and more. There she finds her real love with the master of the house, Mr. Rochester. She faces many problems and passes through several difficulties till she gains the happy life that she has been looking for.

5.2. Theories of Idioms Translation:

Although translation has been practiced for a very long time, translation theory is a relatively young discipline. Translation theory started developing only in the 1950s (Ingo 1990: 11)¹⁰. It is still a developing discipline, which is why, according to Wills (1982: 52), it has not yet developed a precisely defined theory or methodology.

The translation theory according to Newmark (1981: 19) is “the body of knowledge that we have and have still to have about the process of translation”. Whereas Wills (1982: 13) points out that the translation theory examines the transferability of texts from one language to another, in addition to the resemblance of the effect created by both the ST and the TT. Catford, on the other hand, in his “A Linguistic Theory of Translation” suggests four kinds of translation: Phonetic, semantic, grammatical and lexical translation. This classification led Catford to find out that the equivalence between the ST and the TT depends on the correspondence of vocabulary. Catford’s theory can be used mainly to facilitate translation on both vocabulary and syntax levels.

Peter Newmark also establishes the socio-cultural theory of translation in which he assumes that language is culture, and translation is just a tool to express this culture. According to this theory, a language does not only offer to its users means of communication; it also gives them a different vision to analyze a particular experience, i.e. one does not translate language, they rather translate culture, and that is the case with translating idioms. Translation theory is full of different kinds of theoretical concepts; however, only the ones related to the translation of idioms are defined in this section.

The concept of meaning is one of the theoretical concepts concerning idiom translation. It is an essential concept in translation theory, since the whole process of translation is concerned with meaning. Translations are said to have the same meaning as the original text. Newmark says that “meaning is complicated, many-leveled, a network of relations” (Chesterman 1989: 134). Whereas Larson (1984: 36) states that translation aims at transferring the meaning of the text in one language to another, paying a special attention to the different types of meanings. According to Nida and Taber (1969), there are three different types of meanings: grammatical,

referential and connotative meaning. Vehmas-Lehto (2002: 24), on the other hand proposes four different types of meanings which are relevant to translation: denotative, connotative, pragmatic and interlinguistic meaning¹¹.

The various types of meaning that are mentioned here indicate that meaning is a complex issue in translation. However, to translate idioms, the translator should take into consideration the figurative meaning. Each term has a primary, literal meaning. And has also an additional, figurative meaning which differs completely or slightly from the first meaning.

A further concept in translation theory is the concept of equivalence. Translation theorists attempt to define it from different viewpoints. According to Bassnett and Lefevere (1998: 2), there could be actually something like a universally applicable equivalence¹², even if today the translator is free to choose the equivalent, they find appropriate and faithful, as they ensure that the TT is presented in perfect conditions to the audience. Additionally, Nida (1969) assumes that dynamic equivalence may be the best-known view on translation equivalence. Accordingly, dynamic equivalence is that which makes the TL reader receive the text as the SL reader does. Catford, however, has another translation equivalence which is textual equivalence. He argues that the TT is equivalent to the ST when they are interchangeable in a given situation. As a result, translation theory concerning translating idioms contains different concepts, among which are the two main concepts that are explicated above: the meaning and equivalence concept.

5.3. Idioms Translation Strategies:

The translator of the chosen Arabic version of Jane eyre, Hilmi Morad, appeared to use three kinds of translation strategies for idioms. these strategies were:

a. Expressions and functions correspond in both languages:

When both expressions and functions correspond in both the ST and the TT, the translation will be totally correct and idiomatic. Since the translator is a native speaker in one language and has native-like competence in the other, they should encounter no serious difficulties in turning SL idioms into the corresponding TL idioms. The translator of Jane Eyre, for instance, used this strategy in translating some idioms in the novel. We can obviously see that in the following examples:

Unconsciousness closed the scene (28)	أسدل الإغماء الستار على المنظر (48)
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The smile on his lips froze (309)	تجمدت الابتسامة على شفثيه (320)
You offered me your shoulder before (309)	قدمت لي كتفك من قبل (320)
Gave me credit of being a sort of infant Guy Fawkes (42)	وصفتني أنني أشبه جاي فوكس في طفولته (63)

The idioms above are just a sample of this category of translation strategy. This category includes about 200 idioms which are classified as purely equivalent in both languages.

b. Functions correspond but expressions are completely different:

In this case the translator has a more demanding task due to interference between the SL and the TL at the level of expression. Thus, they must either find the right idiom in the TL, or translate the meaning as best as they can. Translating the meaning is the last solution for the translator. they use it only if they fail to locate the corresponding idiom. The following are examples of such idioms in the novel among about 150 collected idioms:

We can none of us help our nature (240)	ليس لنا حول ولا قوة (88)
Overlook the barbarism (267)	اغفري لي التعبير السخيف (113)
Hear the breakers boil (230)	ترغي وتزبد (51)
Hither and thither (32)	هنا وهناك (53)
Every now and then (35)	بين الحين والآخر (56)

c. Functions correspond but expressions differ slightly:

This was the most used strategy to translate idioms in Jane Eyre into Arabic. In this strategy idioms require the translator to pay a special attention to the areas of difference in expression between the SL and the TL. However, they are not as problematic as idioms in the second strategy where functions correspond but expressions do not. They are, nevertheless, more problematic than idioms in the first strategy in which both functions and expressions correspond. The translator of Jane Eyre found it appropriate to use this strategy more than the other ones. These are some examples from the novel:

Cut her off without a shilling	حرمها من كل شلن في ثروته
Come to an age (241)	يبلغ سن الرشده (89)

Not to deviate an inch from the beaten center (266)	لا أحيـد قيد أنملة (111)
Thoughts are busy in your heart (301)	تساورك الأفكار (270)

Conclusion:

While idioms are often considered difficult to translate, they do not seem to represent a major translation problem in terms of translatability. Thus, idioms cannot really be considered as something very problematic to translate, since their meaning can always be transmitted to the TL by some means. The problem of idiom translation is, however, related to culture. Since idioms are products of culture, the translator should be aware that they are translating a culture not only a language.

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⁶ Ibid. p 57

⁷ Noor Belfaqeeh. Strategies For Translating Idioms and Culturally-Bound Expressions within the Human Development Genre. University of Brimingham. UK. 2009. p 2

⁸ ibid. p 5

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¹⁰ Sanna Mustonen. Translating idioms: A Case Study on Donna Tartt's *The Secret History* and its finnish translation. University of Jyväskylä. 2010. p 14.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Sanna Mustonen. Translating idioms: A Case Study on Donna Tartt's *The Secret History* and its finnish translation. University of Jyväskylä. 2010. p 18.