

Translating US Presidential Proverbs from English into Arabic: A Comparative Analysis

Yasir ABDULSATTAR MUTAR¹

University of Anbar – Iraq

yasir.mutar@uoanbar.edu.iq

 0000-0002-4363-4455

Received 21/11/2025

Accepted 14/06/2026

Published 01/07/2026

Abstract

This research examines the translation of proverbs attributed to US presidents into Arabic, focusing on the rhetorical, linguistic, and cultural challenges of conveying politically charged expressions across diverse societal frameworks. These aphorisms, attributed to figures such as Franklin Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, Ronald Reagan, and George H.W. Bush, serve as powerful tools for conveying ideological, ethical, and motivational messages, frequently employing metaphor, antithesis, and parallelism to achieve rhetorical effectiveness. Translating these expressions into Arabic requires more than simply achieving textual equivalence; it necessitates intercultural mediation, consideration of surrounding contexts, and deliberate adaptation to ensure the semantic content remains intact and its impact is maintained. Drawing on Skopos theory, this work prioritizes functional relevance over literal adherence to the ST, exploring how historical, rhetorical, and cultural components are processed to ensure the primary communicative objective is preserved. The methodology relies on a combination of analytical comparison, stylistic examination, and rhetorical evaluation of selected proverbs and their Arabic equivalents, considering literal, adaptive, and modifying methods of translation. The pivotal role of the translator as a mediator is highlighted, demonstrating the ability to balance adherence to the original intellectual meaning with the suitability of the output for the TL audience. This demonstrates that successful translation within political discourse is a practice based on cultural compromise, rhetorical precision, and adherence to ethical standards.

Keywords; Cross-Cultural Rhetoric; Political Discourse; Presidential Rhetoric; Proverb; Skopos.

¹ Corresponding author: Yasir ABDULSATTAR MUTAR, yasir.mutar@uoanbar.edu.iq

Journal of Languages & Translation © 2026. Published by University of Chlef, Algeria.

This is an open access article under the CC BY license <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

1. Introduction

Communication in the political sphere, particularly within the realm of presidential discourse, constitutes a vital intersection of ideology, language, and culture. Among the expressive mechanisms frequently employed by US presidents, proverbs emerge as powerful tools that distill complex political doctrines into clear and impactful forms. Their value transcends mere verbal expression; they embody moral guidance, accumulated wisdom from history, and culturally rooted intellectual frameworks. This research aims to analyze the translation of American proverbs inspired by presidential speeches into Arabic, exploring the stylistic, linguistic, and cultural obstacles encountered in conveying these contextually relevant expressions to Arabic-speaking audiences. The proverbs used in the political speeches of figures like Franklin Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, and Ronald Reagan can be seen not merely as rhetorical flourishes, but as deliberate rhetorical practices. Roosevelt's famous line, "We have nothing to fear but fear itself," and Kennedy's "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for it," exemplify effective rhetoric aimed at motivating, unifying, and mobilizing citizens. Translating these proverbs into another language is not simply a matter of lexical equivalence; it requires cultural mediation, an awareness of the surrounding context, and tactical reframing to ensure the preservation of their persuasive meaning and communicative impact (Mieder, 1997; Charteris-Black, 2011).

The difficulty is compounded when bridging two linguistically and culturally disparate societies: the English-speaking American environment and Arabic-speaking societies. The rich literary tradition and inherent rhetorical devices of Arabic constitute both an enabling and a hindering framework for translation. The translator must reconcile differing worldviews, political and intellectual systems, and disparate communication styles, while avoiding potential semantic distortion or rhetorical trivialization. This process holds exceptional significance within the realm of political discourse, where language serves as a tool for persuasion, identity formation, and diplomatic interaction between states (Zaharna, 1995; Hatim & Mason, 1997).

This study seeks to examine how proverbs attributed to American presidents can be successfully translated into Arabic while preserving their stylistic value and cultural impact. It aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To investigate the rhetorical and political functions of these proverbs within presidential speeches.
2. To examine the cultural and linguistic obstacles that hinder the translation process.
3. To employ language translation methodologies, focusing on the theoretical framework of Skopos theory.
4. To assess the translator's discretion and the ethical constraints associated with translating political texts.

The primary goal is to contribute to the field of translation studies specializing in political discourse by providing a deeper understanding of the mechanisms for translating expressions associated with a specific cultural environment within cross-border political communication—a process characterized by meticulous execution and the sensitivity of the political material. From this perspective, translation is not merely a neutral transfer of content, but a practice grounded in intellectual and cultural considerations. As Venuti (1995) asserts, the translator is an active participant whose decisions—including retention, modification, and deletion—influence how the ST is received and interpreted. This issue is particularly significant in the realm of political discourse, where the stakes are high, and the understanding of the TL audience can impact public opinion, international relations, or even the outcome of elections. Therefore, translators must bridge the linguistic and cultural gap while remaining mindful of relevant normative and intellectual considerations.

Presidential aphorisms derive their persuasive power from their ability to condense intellectual frameworks into concise and easily recalled phrases. Their brevity masks a semantic complexity, and their

cultural resonance depends on accumulated historical and social experiences. When translating these elements into a different linguistic and cultural environment, the translator faces two options: either formulating equivalent statements in terms of meaning, or risking the loss of their communicative function (Baker, 1992; Schaffer, 2000). To illustrate, translating Reagan's proverb "Trust, but verify" into Arabic necessitates engaging with the atmosphere of the Cold War, the prevailing political distrust in American society, and cultural principles that may not entirely align with Arab social and political contexts.

Political discourse in Arab societies is similarly rich in its use of metaphors and inherited wisdom, but it often draws its content from different religious and cultural references. Translators must possess a comprehensive understanding of these reference frameworks to ensure that the translated message is not interpreted by the receiving audience as culturally alien or contextually inappropriate. Zaharna (1995) points out that the effectiveness of cross-cultural political communication depends on the suitability of the rhetorical styles to societal values, a fundamental requirement in the transmission of proverbs. This paper stems from a growing awareness of the importance of culturally sensitive translation approaches within political frameworks. Increasing global interconnectedness and growing international interdependence have amplified the role of language transfer in media, diplomacy, and transnational political interactions. As Al-Hassani (2013) observes, Western political discourse has become a powerful presence in the Arab public sphere, making its accurate and strategic translation not merely a matter of relevance, but a pressing necessity.

2. Literature Review

The use of proverbs, particularly within the realm of political discourse, has garnered significant research attention. Given their deep linguistic and cultural roots, translating these proverbs presents a methodological challenge, especially when incorporated into presidential speeches imbued with ideological dimensions. This overview presents a review of theoretical models and contemporary studies concerning proverb translation, cultural adaptation, and rhetorical mechanisms, aiming to establish a framework for further research.

2.1 Foundational Theories in Translation Studies

The works of Nida (1964), Newmark (1981), and Baker (1992) form the cornerstones of modern translation studies. Nida's theory of dynamic equivalence stresses the need to elicit a corresponding response from the recipient, prioritizing communicative effect over formal correspondence. This principle is particularly important in the transmission of proverbs, which aim to evoke an emotional or intellectual resonance. Newmark's (1981) distinction between the communicative and semantic approaches to linguistic transfer raises the dilemma of prioritizing clarity over commitment. While the semantic approach aims to preserve the content of the ST, the communicative approach focuses on conveying the intended meaning, making it more suitable for translating proverbs within political discourse. Meanwhile, Baker's (1992) influential research focuses on the complexities of transferring fixed terms and idioms, offering a comprehensive understanding of the resulting structural and cultural obstacles. Venuti (1995) introduces the notions of domestication and foreignization, highlighting the normative and political aspects of language transfer. Regarding proverbs attributed to American presidents, the choice between these two strategies determines how the Arabic-speaking audience receives the message, revealing the intellectual stance of the transmitter.

2.2 Proverbs in Political Rhetoric

Proverbs have an exceptional presence in political discourse, serving as concise and culturally rich expressions that embody complex ideas, values, and intellectual orientations. In presidential speeches, their function extends beyond mere linguistic embellishment; they represent strategic rhetorical tools aimed at legitimizing power, reinforcing shared identity, and grounding political orientations within coherent frameworks. American presidents have notably relied on parable discourse to articulate national principles, justify government decisions, and communicate with the electorate. As Mieder (1997) details,

leaders such as Franklin Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, and Ronald Reagan employed proverbs to shape political discourse in ways that were not only accessible but also possessed the power to evoke emotional and moral resonance.

Roosevelt's famous saying, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself," holds historical significance as a call to resilience during the Great Depression, galvanizing national spirit and highlighting the role of confident leadership (Leuchtenburg, 1995). Similarly, Kennedy's formula, "Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country," demonstrates how proverbs can inspire a sense of civic responsibility and national solidarity (Schlesinger, 2002). Although these formulas originate from specific political and historical contexts, their rhetorical power has endured through time thanks to their linguistic concision, metaphorical structure, and cultural resonance. Their effectiveness stems not only from their stylistic appeal but also from their ability to encapsulate complex national ideologies in powerful and timeless language.

Charteris-Black's (2011) analysis highlights the function of proverbs and similar rhetorical devices in political discourse, facilitating a sense of connection between the leader and the public. This connection is particularly important in democratic systems, whose legitimacy often rests on voluntary public acceptance rather than coercion. Proverbs provide leaders with a tool to normalize political visions by integrating them into shared knowledge and collective cultural norms. They represent concise expressions that allow leaders to bypass complex debates while simultaneously presenting normative pronouncements on values, responsibility, and national identity. According to Lakoff (2002), this figurative language, including proverbs, relies on underlying metaphorical models that shape individuals' social and political perceptions. For example, portraying the nation as a family unit—often reinforced by linguistic metaphors—allows politicians to present themselves as paternalistic figures responsible for guiding and protecting their subjects. The tactical importance of proverbs within political discourse lies in their potential to bridge the cognitive gap between elite language and popular understanding. They simplify complex or abstract policies, thereby increasing their comprehension and eliciting responses from the public. As Glonti (2020) observes in her research on political speeches in Georgia and France, proverbs are often employed to provide value-based justifications, convey intellectual orientations, and invoke collective cultural memory. In the presidential context, proverbs constitute key elements in national narratives, enabling speakers to present themselves as knowledgeable about and aware of their heritage.

The rhetorical power of proverbs creates complex challenges in their translation. Their metaphorical and symbolic structures often carry specific cultural references, rhetorical devices, or historical allusions that may not translate smoothly across different linguistic systems or cultural frameworks (Baker, 1992). For example, translating Kennedy's discourse on social responsibility into Arabic requires not only linguistic adaptation but also a cultural shift that aligns with the collective perspective, potentially necessitating adaptation to Arab political traditions and value systems. The potential for distortion or misunderstanding increases when the source and TL cultures differ in their value systems, modes of expression, or intellectual foundations. Proverbs in American presidential speeches frequently draw inspiration from democratic idealism, individualism, and the Protestant ethic of action—principles that do not necessarily align with their counterparts in Arab societies, where collectivist principles, Islamic ethics, and hierarchical social structures may prevail (Zaharna, 1995). In such circumstances, the translator must balance the need to preserve the doctrinal significance of the original with the necessity of making appropriate contextual adjustments to ensure the rhetorical effect is achieved within the target context. This dual challenge highlights the need for culturally informed translation methodologies that go beyond superficial lexical equivalents.

In the political sphere, proverbs serve as ideological symbols, implicitly supporting dominant narratives or resisting opposing viewpoints. Mieder (1997) and Schaffer (2000) argue that these expressions are not devoid of ideological bias; rather, they often reflect and reinforce specific societal norms, political values, and mythical historical narratives. During the process of translating these proverbs, the translator inevitably becomes an active participant in the production—or transformation—of these intellectual frameworks. This adds another layer of complexity, as linguistic choices can carry political connotations, particularly within highly sensitive or polarized diplomatic contexts.

In short, proverbs in presidential speeches are not merely rhetorical embellishments, but rather cultural symbols, ideological tools, and integrated rhetorical strategies. Their use allows political leaders to craft their discourse in a comprehensible and palatable manner. This presents translators with a highly complex challenge: they need to grasp not only the proverb's apparent meaning, but also its historical weight, emotional appeal, and intellectual function. Therefore, the successful translation of presidential proverbs into Arabic requires a broad understanding of cultural characteristics, an awareness of stylistic nuances, and an understanding of normative meanings. Only by addressing these aspects can the intended impact of the original proverb be preserved—or effectively adapted—for Arabic-speaking audiences.

2.3 Cultural and Cognitive Approaches

The deeply rooted cultural nature of proverbs motivates researchers to study translation methodologies that consider cultural dimensions. Millar (2020) classifies language transfer methodologies into three patterns: openness (creative adaptation), closure (adherence to literal meaning), and transformation (balanced reformulation). He asserts that the most suitable methodologies for achieving a balance between preserving cultural significance and achieving figurative impact are transformational strategies. Cognitive and pragmatic frameworks contribute to understanding how proverbs function across cultures. Maalej (2009) defines proverbs as cultural reference frameworks and communicative practices, requiring the translator to explore implicit meanings. Wilson's (2009) cognitive-descriptive model, on the other hand, emphasizes the need to maintain metaphorical coherence during translation. These approaches underscore the importance of reconciling cognitive expectations with cultural appropriateness in the TL.

2.4 Political Ideologies and Ethical Considerations

The process of linguistic translation is inherently complex. Schaffer (2000) and Venuti (1995) both point to translators as active participants in the discursive field, whose decisions reflect and contribute to shaping political narratives. In translating presidential proverbs, the translator's role extends beyond mere linguistic conversion to encompass the management of intellectual positions. This issue becomes even more critical when proverbs embody values such as individualism, national identity, and moral justification, the interpretations of which may vary within Arab cultural contexts. Aldanani (2018) highlights the normative aspects of translating politically sensitive texts. Their research urges translators to be more mindful of the social and political consequences of their translation choices. Proverbs often carry value authority, and distorting their meanings can lead to misunderstandings on both cultural and diplomatic levels.

2.5 Pedagogical and Methodological Gaps

Despite the abundance of theoretical research, methodological models for translating proverbs in high-stakes political contexts remain limited. Al Shehab (2016) observes that translation students often lack the necessary training to handle subtle cultural differences, leading to inaccurate interpretations. Abrighach (2024) proposes "contextualization" as an educational framework that integrates the cultural dimension and the pragmatic function, representing a new approach to training translators to deal with political discourse.

3. Methodology

This research adopts a comparative and analytical methodology to study the translation of proverbs attributed to American presidents into Arabic. It seeks to identify the difficulties, methodologies, and stylistic implications of these translation processes within Arabic political discourse. This section defines the criteria for selecting proverb samples, the analytical model employed, and the mechanisms applied in the study.

3.1 Selection Criteria

The selection of proverbs was based on criteria including historical value, rhetorical significance, and frequency of use in American presidential speeches. Speeches by figures such as Franklin Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, and Ronald Reagan were favored due to their enduring rhetorical impact and the widespread dissemination of their proverbial sayings. The selection of proverbs was also linked to their relevance to the current Arab political context and their prominence in Arab media platforms (Al-Hassani, 2013).

3.2 Analytical Framework

The comparative study is guided by three overlapping criteria:

1. Linguistic Structure – Analytical attention is focused on the grammatical and lexical correspondences and variations between the original English proverbs and their Arabic translations. Particular emphasis is placed on vocabulary, tense usage, idiomatic expressions, and figurative language (Baker, 1992).
2. Cultural Framework – The study investigates how implicit references associated with the source culture have been preserved, modified, or replaced in the TL. It also examines the extent to which culturally foreign concepts have been Arabized or retained, along with explanatory clarifications (Hatim & Mason, 1997).
3. Performance – The third axis assesses the extent to which the translated forms retain the persuasive power of the original text. This includes measuring the impact, clarity, and political significance of the Arabic text, especially in official political communication (Charteris-Black, 2011).

3.3 Data Sources and Tools

The primary source material consists of a collection of official proverbs of presidential speeches and their corresponding Arabic texts, both officially published and those prepared by researchers for comparative purposes. The tools employed are stylistic, discourse analysis, and thematic classification. Academic contributions related to the transmission of proverbs, rhetorical approaches, and intercultural communication (Mieder, 1997; Schaffer, 2000) support the qualitative findings. Where necessary, real-time media coverage and political commentary are used to assess audience engagement and the significance of context. This research design enables a deeper understanding of how cultural, linguistic, and rhetorical dynamics interact during the transmission of American presidential proverbs.

4. Translation Strategies and Skopos Theory

The Skopos theory, established by Reiss and Vermeer (1984), is based on the principle that the process of linguistic translation should be guided by the intended function of the TT. In the field of political translation, this often entails achieving persuasion, mobilization, or reassurance for the TL audience. Therefore, the translation methodology must align with the desired rhetorical effect of the ST within the receiving cultural context. In the realm of proverbs used in presidential speeches, multiple approaches can be applied. A saying intended to encourage collaborative action during crises (such as Roosevelt's speeches) requires a borrowed phrasing that emphasizes both hope and urgency. Conversely, a phrase meant to warn or sow doubt (like Reagan's "Trust, but verify") might necessitate a more measured, realistic tone in Arabic, drawing on expressions rooted in cultural context. Pragmatic adaptation, cultural equivalence, and figurative simulation are key methodologies. Domestication can be employed to integrate a utterance into familiar frame of reference, while foreignization preserves its distinctive character for stylistic or political purposes (Venuti, 1995). The linguistic carrier must balance these alternatives while considering normative controls and the expectations of the audience.

In conclusion, the Skopos theory allows the translator to prioritize the communicative purpose over the formal structure, especially when conveying political proverbs whose effectiveness is contingent on the environment and reception. These theoretical frameworks offer the necessary tactical flexibility to ensure that translated texts successfully achieve their objectives within highly sensitive political contexts.

4. Analysis and Discussion

This section presents a comparative assessment of nine proverbs used in presidential speeches, focusing on how their meanings and rhetorical effects are preserved or altered during translation from English to Arabic. This examination seeks to explore the complex interplay between expressive choices, contextual frameworks, and stylistic effectiveness in the process of linguistic translation.

Example 1: "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself."

Franklin Roosevelt's inaugural address in 1933, "*The only thing we have to fear is fear itself*," stands as one of the most influential moments in modern political history. Delivered at the height of the global economic crisis, it aimed to calm the anxieties of a nation grappling with financial collapse and societal despair. As Leuchtenburg (1995) notes, Roosevelt's words were not merely a description of reality, but a symbolic embodiment that transformed the nation's fear into a metaphorical enemy. Their purpose was to restore public confidence and offer psychological courage as a crucial prerequisite for recovery.

Rhetorically, the statement skillfully employs the technique of "*antimetabole*"—the reiteration and reversal of key concepts—creating both resonance and focus. The rhythm of the English formulation and its abstract embodiment of "fear itself" elevate it beyond mere advice to the level of moral exhortation. The statement functions as a blend of reassurance and guidance, drawing on the psychological power of brevity and antithesis—characteristics deeply rooted in the Western rhetorical tradition stemming from ancient oratory and scriptural parallelism (Charteris-Black, 2011). Culturally, the message embodies the American tendency toward flexible individualism and self-determination. Roosevelt's metaphorical portrayal presents fear as an internal adversary, thus reinforcing a nationalist ideology based on independence and preemptive struggle. However, this implicit concept of fear, when translated into Arabic, may resonate differently, as Arabic discursive frameworks tend to frame fear within communal or religious contexts (Al-Hassani, 2013).

From a *Skopos* perspective, the translator must ensure that the TT performs the same communicative and rhetorical function in Arabic as it does in English. Consequently, functional appropriateness takes precedence over formal correspondence. A literal translation, such as "الخوف الوحيد الذي يجب أن نخافه هو الخوف ذاته," maintains grammatical and lexical accuracy but risks losing its persuasive power. The repetition of the word "الخوف" lacks the rhythmic and conceptual force of "fear itself," partly because Arabic does not typically employ self-contrast to generate emotional charge. Thus, the phrase may come across as redundant rather than a semantic shift. A practical rhetorical adaptation, such as "الخوف لا يقهر إلا بالإقدام" offers a reformulation of the implicit meaning of the original proverb. This modification aligns with Arabic stylistic conventions, which tend toward procedural directives imbued with value-laden and behavioral undertones. It activates the principle of initiative and stimulates the very resolve that Roosevelt sought to cultivate, achieving a functional balance through pragmatic adaptation.

A modification based on cultural integration, such as "الخوف عدو الشجاعة، فلنواجهه بالإيمان والعزم" expands the aphorism to include the values of certainty and determination—two principles firmly established in Arab-Islamic discourse. This modified formulation achieves Roosevelt's rhetorical goal of empowerment and reassurance, but places it within a frame of reference in which the Arab recipient finds an emotional and spiritual response. In contrast, a balanced, conciliatory formulation, such as "لنقهر خوفنا بالشجاعة والإقدام" retains the motivational exhortation of the ST while adopting the dynamic imperative form familiar in Arab political discourse. This modification preserves the essence of Roosevelt's call to action,

while maintaining its emotional intensity and impactful rhythm. In the context of modern Arab political discourse, each translated formula serves its function uniquely, depending on the surrounding circumstances and the expectations of the audience. The literal version, “الخوف الوحيد الذي يجب أن نخافه هو” “الخوف ذاته” may prove more effective in the formal transmission of historical speeches or academic frameworks, preserving Roosevelt's stylistic originality for documentary or educational purposes. Conversely, the phrase “الخوف لا يقهر إلا بالإقدام” resonates more deeply in speeches focused on national revival or youth empowerment, where courage is emphasized as a pivotal force for change. Meanwhile, the culturally rich formula, “الخوف عدو الشجاعة، فلنواجهه بالإيمان والعزم” is well-suited to political discourse with a religious or moral bent, appealing to the public through the power of collective faith and value-based conviction. The hybrid formula, “لنقهر خوفنا بالشجاعة والإقدام” is expected to be successful in contemporary media platforms or leadership discourse that seeks to combine emotional fervor with practical resolve.

Therefore, from a Skopos perspective, the transmission of this proverb becomes a process of rhetorical mediation rather than linguistic reproduction. The translator's choices must consider the intended communicative function, the socio-political environment, and the cultural expectations of the TL. All these possibilities are encompassed by the translator's goal of reviving Roosevelt's original psychological and rhetorical impact—transforming fear from a state of paralysis into a driving force, transcending linguistic and cultural barriers.

Example 2: "This generation of Americans has a rendezvous with destiny." – Franklin D. Roosevelt

Franklin Roosevelt's declaration, “*This generation of Americans has a rendezvous with destiny*,” delivered at the 1936 Democratic National Convention, stands as one of the most prescient and inspiring statements in his oratorical legacy. This phrase emerged during the critical period preceding World War II, seeking to awaken American public opinion to its extraordinary historical responsibility. Roosevelt envisioned his generation standing on the threshold of a pivotal historical juncture—one that would determine not only the fate of the United States but also the value-based direction of the contemporary world. Thus, his speech blended the urgency of political action with the grandeur of destiny, transforming civic duty into a shared ethical imperative.

The rhetorical power of the statement lies in the metaphor of “rendezvous”—a word that signifies an event both predetermined and fateful. It carries connotations of inevitability, anticipation, and a moral imperative. This choice of expression transforms abstract fate into an occasion for encounter, suggesting that history has issued an unavoidable invitation. The phrase functions as a prophetic proclamation, blending poetic grandeur with the necessity of a national call. Its rhythm and lofty vocabulary reinforce Roosevelt's image as a visionary leader, placing his generation within a universal moral framework (Charteris-Black, 2011). From a Cultural perspective, translating this expression into Arabic necessitates a delicate mediation between Anglo-Saxon conceptions of “destiny” and Islamic notions of predestination *القدر* (divine fate). While both concepts share the idea of determinism, the term “*القدر*” carries strong religious and deterministic connotations, suggesting predetermined outcomes rather than active human will. Thus, the Arabic phrase “هذا الجيل من الأمريكيين لديه موعد مع القدر” faithfully reproduces the textual structure but risks failing to capture Roosevelt's mobilizing and proactive intent. Furthermore, the use of “موعد” softens the “appointment,” reducing it to a neutral or procedural tone and diminishing the epic resonance of the original text (Al-Hassani, 2013).

Applying the framework of *Skopos* theory, the translator must prioritize the communicative function over literal fidelity. The primary purpose of Roosevelt's speech was to inspire moral readiness and collective courage. Therefore, the translated version should evoke not passive acceptance of fate, but rather proactive engagement with historical responsibility. A dynamic phrase such as “هذا الجيل من الأمريكيين يواجه”

"قدرًا محتومًا" infuses the speech with vitality through the verb "يواجه" "faces," which conveys awareness and active will. An alternative formulation, "هذا الجيل من الأمريكيين سيصنع مصيره بنفسه" departs further from the original while still achieving the communicative goal of highlighting agency and responsibility—two central tenets of Roosevelt's mobilizing rhetoric. This formulation draws inspiration from the Arabic literary tradition that extols determination and self-assertion (boldness), echoing proverbs like "من جدّ وجد" "He who strives, succeeds."

The compromise formulation, "هذا الجيل من الأمريكيين على موعد مع مصيره الحتمي" retains the original metaphor while amplifying the implication through "مصيره الحتمي." This achieves a balance between poetic grandeur and moral inevitability, which is well-suited to official political discourse. In the field of contemporary Arab political discourse, each translated formula serves a distinct rhetorical function. The textual formula aligns with academic and documentary frameworks that emphasize fidelity to the historical original. The defiant formula, "يواجه قدرًا محتومًا" resonates in speeches advocating steadfastness during national crises. The proactive formula, "سيصنع مصيره بنفسه" appeals to reformist and youth-oriented discourses, reinforcing the values of empowerment and human agency. The hybrid formula, on the other hand, is most effective in eulogizing discourses that aim to evoke a resolute will grounded in moral destiny. Through the lens of Skopos, translating a Roosevelt proverb becomes an interpretive creative process, where the translator mediates between different cultural conceptions of predestination, responsibility, and agency. The primary objective is not to reproduce a lexical correspondence to the ST, but rather to preserve its rhetorical message—to awaken collective consciousness and urge a generation to confront its historical destiny with courage and determination.

Example 3: "We must be the great arsenal of democracy." – Franklin D. Roosevelt

Roosevelt's 1940 statement, made before the United States officially entered World War II, carried immense historical and rhetorical weight. During a period of rising fascism globally, Roosevelt transformed industrial mobilization into a moral imperative. The metaphor of the "arsenal" presented the American state not merely as an arms manufacturer, but as the industrial and moral foundation for the continuity of the democratic system itself. By advocating for America to be "the great arsenal of democracy," Roosevelt redefined military production as a safeguard of universal principles, merging economic power with moral accountability. The statement's rhetorical power lies in its deliberate juxtaposition of seemingly contradictory concepts—"arsenal," symbolizing armament, and "democracy," embodying peace and justice. This juxtaposition sanctifies industrial capacity as a form of moral guardianship. The definite article "the" and the adjective "great" further emphasize the unique and inevitable nature of the statement, elevating it to the level of a collective mandate rather than a mere political suggestion.

Translating this statement into Arabic as "يجب أن نكون ترسانة الديمقراطية العظيمة" maintains lexical accuracy but risks a cultural semantic shift. While the word "ترسانة" perfectly matches the English term, in Arabic political and social discourse it evokes military or authoritarian imagery rather than a defense of values. Abdel-Malek (1963) points out that military metaphors in the Arabic context often refer to state coercion or expansion, which fundamentally contradicts Roosevelt's intended image of noble protection. Consequently, the literal version may unintentionally frame the message as an endorsement of militarism rather than a call for moral guardianship. According to Skopos's theoretical framework, linguistic translation must prioritize communicative function over literal textual adherence; therefore, the translator should rephrase the metaphor to evoke the same functional and emotional resonance in the TL culture. A more culturally sensitive formulation, such as "يجب أن نكون درع الديمقراطية القوي" or "يجب أن نكون حماة الديمقراطية في العالم" preserves the persuasive intent of the original while remaining consistent with Arabic rhetorical conventions that value defense and protection over armament. This adaptation also adheres to Nida's (1964) principle of Dynamic Equivalence, ensuring that the translation evokes a similar ideological and

emotional response in Arab readers. By reshaping the metaphor within the sensibilities of the TL culture, the translation achieves its communicative purpose: to stimulate a collective moral imperative without diminishing the power of Roosevelt's original appeal to arms.

Example 4: "Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country." – John F. Kennedy

John F. Kennedy's 1961 inaugural address is considered one of the most influential political speeches of the modern era. Delivered at the height of the Cold War, it underscored the critical need for national unity and a renewal of values in the face of ideological division. As Schlesinger (2002) notes, Kennedy's speech redefined the relationship between the individual and the state, transforming democratic participation from a passive right into an active moral responsibility. The speech's brilliance lies in its balance of contrast and parallelism. The symmetrical reflection, "Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country," integrates a complex civic vision into a timeless ethical imperative. Its rhythm and structure enhance its recall, while simultaneously reinforcing the idea of diligent service as the highest expression of patriotism.

In the Arabic context, this proverb is often reformulated as: "لا تسأل عما يمكن لبلدك أن يقدمه لك، بل اسأل ماذا يمكنك أن تقدم لبلدك." This rendering preserves the structural coherence and stylistic balance of the original text, maintaining its rhythm and effectiveness. However, while Kennedy's message stems from an American individualistic ethic—emphasizing personal initiative and civic responsibility—the Arab cultural environment tends to prioritize collective identity and social duty. In societies that value social cohesion and familial or national solidarity over individual initiative, the value-laden orientation of the English proverb may appear overly individualistic. According to *Skopos* theory, the process of translating a proverb should serve its communicative function within the TL cultural framework rather than adhering strictly to the source form. Therefore, the translator may modify the wording to ensure functional equivalence and rhetorical effect.

Consequently, a culturally appropriate formulation could be: "لا تسألوا عما يمكن للبلد أن يفعله من أجلكم، بل اسألوا ما يمكنكم فعله من أجل الوطن" shifting the focus from the individual to the collective sphere. Alternatively, the phrase "ليكن السؤال لا عما يمنحه الوطن لك، بل عما تمنحه أنت لوطنك" softens the sense of obligation while preserving the value-laden message. The third option, "بلدك بحاجة إلى عطائك لا إلى مطالبك" adopts a conciliatory, terminological approach that aligns seamlessly with Arabic rhetorical standards. These modifications demonstrate that the goals of linguistic adaptation—in this case, promoting national service—are achievable through rhetorical and cultural recalibration. Ultimately, the success of the translation lies not in replicating Kennedy's grammatical structures, but in evoking the same emotional and value-based resonance with the Arab audience.

Example 5: "Let us never negotiate out of fear, but let us never fear to negotiate." – John F. Kennedy

John F. Kennedy's inaugural address in 1961 encapsulated the foreign policy vision that characterized the early stages of the bipolar world order. During a period when US-Soviet tensions demanded a balance between prudence and caution, this phrase exemplified Kennedy's "flexible response" doctrine—a methodology that sought to balance projecting power with exercising restraint. As White (2011) demonstrates, this statement symbolized an approach to international relations based on moral confidence rather than intimidation, presenting negotiation not as a sign of weakness but as a rational exercise of sovereignty. By combining courage with diplomatic wisdom, Kennedy redefined negotiation as a strategic and principled act—a practice that rejected both retreat and recklessness. This expression is distinguished by a masterful paradoxical symmetry achieved through syntactic duality: "Never negotiate out of fear, but never fear to negotiate." This inverse symmetry—pairing the same elements in a reciprocal order—creates a rhythm of value balance that makes the phrase both timeless

and impactful. This parallel structure also highlights the essential duality of effective diplomacy: strength must be accompanied by a willingness to engage in dialogue, courage by humility. The emphasis on "never" reinforces firmness, while the contrasting phrases lend a sense of rhetorical authority.

In the Arabic context, the phrase "لا ينبغي لنا أبداً أن نتفاوض بدافع الخوف، ولكن لا ينبغي لنا أن نخشى التفاوض أبداً" accurately reproduces the core message but carries a degree of formality that may diminish its impact. The formulaic phrase "لا ينبغي لنا" appears procedural, creating a gap between the discourse and its audience. From a *Skopos* perspective, the purpose of linguistic translation is not literal reproduction but teleological balance—that is, conveying the persuasive tone and moral firmness that Kennedy aimed for. Therefore, a more effective formulation would be "لا نتفاوض بدافع الخوف، ولا نخشى التفاوض أبداً" which simplifies the grammatical structure, enhances the rhythm, and aligns better with the Arabic rhetorical tradition that favors brevity and effectiveness. Among the alternative formulations with pragmatic resonance are, "نتفاوض بثقة لا بخوف، ونؤمن أن التفاوض قوة لا ضعف" highlighting dignity and conviction, or "نختار التفاوض شجاعة لا خوفاً" a concise formulation that echoes Arabic proverbs. A third option, "التفاوض شجاعة الموقف لا خوف الضعف" draws on Arab value discourse, reshaping diplomacy as an embodiment of courage. These adaptations exemplify *Skopos*'s principle of prioritizing the communicative function—in this case, encouraging confident diplomacy within the Arab context—over formal conformity. Ultimately, the success of translating Kennedy's statement is measured by its ability to revive the same balance between firmness and flexibility achieved by the original text within its historical context.

Example 6: "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!" – Ronald Reagan

Ronald Reagan's landmark speech, delivered near the Brandenburg Gate in June 1987, is considered one of the most influential speeches of the late Cold War. His direct address to Soviet leader Gorbachev, "Tear down this wall," transcended conventional political rhetoric, becoming a moral challenge to the ideological divide that separated the two halves of Berlin. As Leeman (2011) argues, Reagan's words represented both a symbolic struggle and a practical act of persuasion, embodying the United States' unwavering commitment to freedom, democracy, and the end of totalitarianism. The historical context amplifies the significance of this speech: in a moment of cautious diplomacy, Reagan's bold declaration reaffirmed the moral authority of the United States, framing the dismantling of the Berlin Wall not merely as a physical act, but as a symbol of human liberation. This phrase is characterized by its economy of words and its literal semantic power. The sentence derives its effectiveness from its imperative structure, its direct address, and its clear rhythm—"Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!" The emphasis on highly symbolic monosyllabic words (tear down, break down, wall) reflects the destructive power they evoke, while the direct address deepens its urgency. This statement represents a drama incarnate: the speaker commands those present not merely to conceive of freedom, but to actually exercise it. Thus, the resolute tone embodies a political certainty and a moral imperative, qualities that have made this statement timeless and a transformative moment in its era.

When translated into Arabic as "سيد غورباتشوف، اهدم هذا الجدار", the faithfully rendered version directly reflects the ST and its simple grammatical structure. However, from a cultural perspective, the verb "اهدم" (dismantle) carries destructive connotations that may evoke instability or rebellion in Arab political discourse. In many Arab societies, direct confrontation—especially when directed at a leading figure—is considered a breach of etiquette or a violation of diplomatic norms. Thus, according to the *Skopos* theory, which prioritizes the communicative function and cultural acceptability of linguistic translation over textual literal correspondence, adaptation becomes necessary to preserve the intended meaning—liberation, not destruction. Therefore, the most culturally appropriate formulation could be, "سيد غورباتشوف، أزل هذا الحاجز" This transforms the metaphor from one of destruction to one of liberation, maintaining the urgency while emphasizing constructive transformation. Another alternative, "افتح هذا الباب للحرية

"بين الشعوب" reframes the metaphor around unity and reconciliation, aligning with Arab values of collective cohesion. A third possibility, "أسيد غورباتشوف، حرّر هذا الجدار من القيود", humanizes the metaphor, transforming the wall into a symbol of oppression that needs liberation. Each formulation aligns with the communicative goal of the original—to inspire freedom and courage—while adapting its metaphors to suit Arab rhetorical and cultural norms. In conclusion, conveying Reagan's challenge requires more than linguistic equivalence; it necessitates cultural mediation. By shifting from a confrontational approach to a discourse of liberation, these modifications preserve the ideological force of the ST while ensuring its effective rhetorical impact within the Arabic-speaking community.

Example 7: "Government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem." – Ronald Reagan

Ronald Reagan's 1981 presidential inaugural address encapsulates the intellectual essence of contemporary conservatism in the United States. Emerging from a period marked by sluggish economic growth, declining public trust, and eroding credibility in government institutions, this statement became an icon of neoliberalism, which emphasized individual liberties, market liberalization, and the empowerment of the private sector. As Smith (2006) notes, this statement crystallized a fundamental shift in American political thought—from a belief in the state's interventionist role to a belief in the economy's capacity for self-regulation. Therefore, the historical significance of this statement lies in its redefinition of the relationship between government and the citizen, portraying the government not as a central agent of development, but as an impediment to economic dynamism and individual accountability. The brilliance of this statement lies in its eloquence and its seemingly paradoxical structure. The contrast between "solution" and "problem" carries semantic and ideological dimensions, generating a striking paradox that challenges prevailing political wisdom. The lexical repetition of the term "government" at both ends of the sentence deepens this contradiction, making it easier for the recipient to grasp the shocking paradox within a single rhythmic framework. This linguistic harmony lends the phrase a necessary quality, persuasive power, and intellectual weight—making it an ideal tool for political mobilization.

Conversely, the meaning of the phrase undergoes significant transformations within Arab contexts. In many Arab-cultural societies, state institutions are often considered the primary guarantors of social stability, welfare, and national cohesion. A literal translation, such as "الحكومة ليست الحل لمشكلتنا؛ الحكومة هي المشكلة", faithfully reproduces the original content, but it may appear overly frank or politically sensitive, especially in circles where direct criticism of authority is culturally restricted. Applying the framework of *Skopos* theory, the translator's purpose shifts from literal adherence to the original text to achieving contextual and communicative relevance. The translational objective—to stimulate civic reflection rather than political challenge—justifies the reformulation within its rhetorical context.

Therefore, a functionally modified formulation might take the following form: "الحكومة ليست الحل، بل يجب أن نبحث عن الحلول خارجها" thus softening the criticism while preserving the core concept of self-reliance. The second alternative, "الحكومة ليست الطريق الوحيد للحل، فالمجتمع جزء من الحل أيضاً" redirects the focus toward participatory reform. Meanwhile, the third proposal, "الإصلاح لا يأتي من الحكومة وحدها، بل من إرادة الناس" aligns organically with Arab rhetorical traditions that emphasize social responsibility and ethical agency. These adaptations, despite deviating from literal accuracy, achieve the proverb's core purpose by conveying its fundamental message—the empowerment of individuals and the decentralization of power—through culturally acceptable and contextually appropriate formulations. In doing so, they transform Reagan's ideological statement into a message focused on collective responsibility and constructive reform, aligning with Arab discourse.

Example 8: "Peace through strength." – Ronald Reagan

Ronald Reagan's phrase "strength for peace" encapsulates the essence of deterrence policy in international conflict, reflecting his conviction that lasting peace rests on effective deterrence and defensive readiness. In the context of escalating confrontation with the Soviet bloc, this formulation was not an expression of passive pacifism, but rather a proactive approach in which military power guaranteed strategic stability. As Charteris-Black (2011) explains, this phrase embodies Reagan's broader ideological vision, which combined national security, moral hegemony, and global expansion. Historically, this statement marked a shift from idealistic conceptions of peace to a pragmatic approach based on deterrence, asserting that the absence of conflict requires a credible threat of force. The rhetorical effect of this formula lies in its succinctness and paradoxical nature. By juxtaposing "peace" and "power," the formula distills a complex geopolitical principle into a concise and timeless wisdom. The economy of language enhances its persuasive power, suggesting that peace is not a passive state, but rather the result of strategic preparedness, moral will, and organized action. This binary pairing of concepts creates a semantic contradiction, prompting the recipient to reconcile the apparent conflict and grasp the intended meaning. In Arabic translation, the textual expression "السلام عبر القوة" retains its concise character and essential moral content. However, the term "القوة" "power" may evoke connotations of coercion or authoritarian domination within Arab social and political contexts, potentially distorting the positive framing of military deterrence as a preventive mechanism. Applying *Skopos* theoretical framework, the translator's primary objective should be to convey the intended functional meaning—maintaining peace through credible authority—while ensuring cultural resonance. Alternative formulations could include "السلام يتحقق من خلال الحزم" emphasizing persistence rather than brute force; "السلام عبر الاستقرار المدعوم بالقوة" which positions power as a supportive, not a controlling, factor; or "السلام من خلال القدرة على الدفاع" which reframes military power as a preventive, not an offensive, force. Together, these options preserve the persuasive power and value framework of the original, adapting the ideal to Arab cultural and rhetorical norms while maintaining its historical and doctrinal significance.

Example 9: "Read my lips: no new taxes." – George H. W. Bush

George H.W. Bush's declaration, "Read my lips: No new taxes," delivered at the 1988 Republican National Convention, is one of the most enduring and significant political statements in modern American history. Its origins lie in its clear assurance to voters, conveying a decisive and firm stance on fiscal matters. However, the subsequent backtracking on this promise—with Bush's agreement to raise taxes—gave the statement added historical weight, transforming it into an icon of political accountability and the consequences of unfulfilled commitments (Edwards, 2000). This statement thus encapsulates both the potential of promises and the risks of rhetorical commitments in electoral politics, illustrating how focused language can amplify political influence. This expression is characterized by its linguistic focus and rhetorical directness. The "Read my lips" directive combines visual imagery with verbal authority, prompting the listener to engage both sensory and cognitively with the content. Its structure is coherent, impactful, and memorable, employing figurative language to enhance the speaker's credibility. By combining personal guidance with programmatic emphasis, it transforms a simple financial promise into a practical, persuasive rhetorical act. From a cultural perspective, the phrase "read my lips" presents a challenge when translated into Arabic. "Direct visual metaphor" is less common in political discourse in Arab contexts, where auditory or textual clarity prevails. Without careful adaptation, the metaphorical imagery may appear obscure or overly literal.

A literal translation like "اقرأ شفهي: لا ضرائب جديدة" preserves the sharpness and clarity of the ST, maintaining its symbolic character. However, within the framework of *Skopos* theory, which prioritizes communicative intent over textual literalness, alternative formulations can enhance cultural comprehension while preserving the figurative impact. For example, "استمع إلي جيداً: لن تكون هناك ضرائب جديدة,"

conveys the meaning but lacks the visual image, while "تأكد من كلامي: لا ضرائب جديدة" maintains firmness and memorability, and "ركز جيداً: لن نفرض ضرائب جديدة" emphasizes attention and authority. These modifications are consistent with the core objectives of the slogan- demonstrating certainty and credibility - while incorporating Arab graphic and cultural standards. In conclusion, rendering Bush's famous phrase requires striking a balance between textual fidelity and functional efficiency. While the original metaphor retains its cultural resonance, the Skopos-based adaptations ensure that this promise remains impactful, culturally palatable, and stylistically persuasive for Arabic-speaking audiences.

Conclusion

Translating American presidential aphorisms into Arabic presents a complex, multifaceted challenge, encompassing semantic, socio-cultural, stylistic, and normative dimensions. This research demonstrates that these expressive statements, far from being mere rhetorical devices, are purposeful discursive tools that embody complex political ideologies, value imperatives, and historical significance. Analysis of statements by figures such as Roosevelt, Kennedy, Reagan, and Bush reveals that relying solely on literal translation often proves insufficient; cultural and rhetorical adaptation becomes essential to maintain the effectiveness of the ST. Theoretical frameworks associated with Skopos provide a guiding framework, enabling translators to prioritize functional equivalence, thereby ensuring that the TL audience perceives the communicative intent with similar clarity, persuasive power, and emotional resonance.

Academic study reveals the temporal dimension of presidential pronouncements, where phrases like Roosevelt's "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself" or Bush's "Read my lips: no new taxes" carry not only historical significance but also inherent rhetorical weight. Stylistically, these expressions employ antithesis, metaphor, and command to mobilize, reassure, or intimidate the masses. Culturally, translating them into Arabic necessitates a thorough examination of terminological specificities, rhetorical traditions, and audience expectations, often requiring strategies of localization, hybridization, or functional adaptation to ensure their continued practical impact.

In conclusion, this research highlights the pivotal role of language in the success of political communication, emphasizing the ethical obligation to convey intellectual content and intentions without distortion. These findings enrich the field of political translation studies by demonstrating how culturally sensitive and purpose-oriented methodologies can build bridges of communication across linguistic and ideological divides, ensuring that presidential proverbs retain their persuasive and stylistic power within Arab contexts. Thus, effective linguistic mediation represents an interpretive, strategic, and culturally enlightened act that preserves both content and impact.

References

- Abdel-Malek, A. (1963). Orientalism in crisis. *Diogenes*, *44*, 102–140.
- Aldanani, M. (2018). Translating metaphorical expressions in political discourse: A comparative conceptual study (English–Arabic). *AWEJ for Translation & Literary Studies*, *2*(4). <https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awejtls/vol2no4.1>
- Al-Hassani, M. (2013). The influence of Western political rhetoric in the Arab world. *Journal of Arab Studies*, *12*(3), 45-67.
- Al Shehab, M. (2016). The ability of translation students in translating English proverbs into Arabic and vice versa at Jadara University in Jordan. *Journal of Literature, Language and Linguistics*, *29*, 10-19.
- Abrighach, R. (2024). Contextualized translation: An alternative strategy to translate culture-specific Moroccan Arabic proverbs in English. *Applied Translation*, *18*(1), 1–8.
- Baker, M. (1992). *In other words: A coursebook on translation*. Routledge.

- Charteris-Black, J. (2011). *Politicians and rhetoric: The persuasive power of metaphor*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Edwards, G. C., III. (2000). *Campaigning and governing: The rhetoric and political impact of the George H. W. Bush presidency*. American Political Science Association.
- Glonti, B. (2020). Proverb as a tool of persuasion in political discourse (on the material of Georgian and French languages). *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, *10*(6), 632–637. <https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.1006.02>
- Hatim, B., & Mason, I. (1997). *The translator as communicator*. Routledge.
- Lakoff, G. (2002). *Moral politics: How liberals and conservatives think* (2nd ed.). University of Chicago Press.
- Leeman, R. W. (2011). The rhetoric of Reagan's "Tear down this wall" speech: A constitutive theory of rhetoric perspective. *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*, *14*(4), 595–626. <https://doi.org/10.1353/rap.2010.0222>
- Leuchtenburg, W. E. (1995). *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal: 1932–1940*. Harper & Row.
- Maalej, Z. (2009). A cognitive-pragmatic perspective on proverbs and its implications for translation. *International Journal of Arabic-English Studies*, *10*(1), 135–154.
- Mieder, W. (1997). *The politics of proverbs: From traditional wisdom to proverbial stereotypes* (Vol. 10). University of Wisconsin Press.
- Millar, S. R. (2020). Openness, closure, and transformation in proverb translation. *The Bible Translator*, *71*(1), 79–100. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2051677019900762>
- Newmark, P. (1981). *Approaches to translation*. Pergamon Press.
- Nida, E. A. (1964). *Toward a science of translating: With special reference to principles and procedures involved in Bible translating*. E.J. Brill.
- Reiss, K., & Vermeer, H. J. (1984). *Towards a general theory of translational action: Skopos theory explained* (C. Nord, Trans.). Routledge.
- Schaffer, F. C. (2000). *Democracy in translation: Understanding politics in an unfamiliar culture*. Cornell University Press.
- Schlesinger, A. M., Jr. (2002). *A thousand days: John F. Kennedy in the White House*. Mariner Books.
- Venuti, L. (1995). *The translator's invisibility: A history of translation*. Routledge.
- White, I. (2011). *The Cuban Missile Crisis and the American myth of victory*. LSU Press.
- Wilson, F. C. (2009). *A model for translating metaphors in proverbs (French to English): A cognitive descriptive approach* [Doctoral dissertation, University of British Columbia]. <https://open.library.ubc.ca/>
- Zaharna, R. S. (1995). *Bridging cultural differences: American public diplomacy efforts with the Arab world*. Public Diplomacy Foundation.