

The Contextual Effects in Translating Metaphoric & Metonymic Proverbs by Novice Translators

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Abstract

This work highlights the most problematic area in the field of translation, which represented by translating cultural expressions 'proverbs'. The study presents the problem in theoretical and practical frameworks. The former gives a specific introduction for translation as the main theoretical aspect related to the subjects of the study and proverbs as the main subject under investigation, while the latter examines the hypotheses on the significant effects for the cultural dimension during the process of translation and testing the role of the context in facilitating the translation of proverbs. Also, explaining the contextual effects on the translators' choices for translation strategies. Finally, To what extent does it help them to overcome the challenges they encountered.

Keywords: SL. Source Language, TL. Target Language, SC. Source Culture, TC. Target Culture, S.TM. Short-term memory, L.TM. Long-term memory

المستخلص:

إن هذا البحث يسلط الضوء على المنطقة الأكثر إشكالية في مجال الترجمة والتي تتمثل في ترجمة التعابير الثقافية " الأمثال ". إذ تقسم الدراسة مشكلة البحث في إطارين: الإطار النظري و الإطار العملي، حيث يبرز الإطار الأول مقدمة ملخصة عن الترجمة باعتبارها الجانب النظري الرئيسي المتعلق بموضوع الدراسة والأمثال كموضوع أساسي قيد التحقيق، في حين أن الثاني يختبر فرضيات الدراسة حول تأثيرات البعد الثقافي على عملية الترجمة. إضافةً الى دور السياق في تسهيل ترجمة الأمثال. كذلك، تبيان تأثير السياق على خيارات المترجمين لإستراتيجيات الترجمة. وأخيراً، إلى أي مدى يساعد السياق المترجمين في التغلب على التحديات التي يواجهونها أثناء الترجمة.

الكلمات الرئيسية: (S.L) اللغة الاصل ، (T.L) لغة الترجمة، (S.C) الثقافة الاصل ، (T.C) ثقافة الترجمة ، (S.TM) الذاكرة قصيرة المدى ، (L.TM) الذاكرة بعيدة المدى.

What do we translate?

Translation is known as the process of transforming meaning, while the translator is the transformer of S.T into T.L but, what did the translator transform or

translate? A simple answer will be the meaning but, what is the meaning and what are its components?

One of the translation theorists suggests that meaning is the general term or the carrier for the linguistic components of communication. Ghazala (2008, p.8) states briefly detailed explanation on the nature of the meaning and suggests that meaning is the outcome and result of complicated networks of four linguistic components, which are 'Syntax (Grammar), Vocabulary (Words), Style and Phonology'. Each of

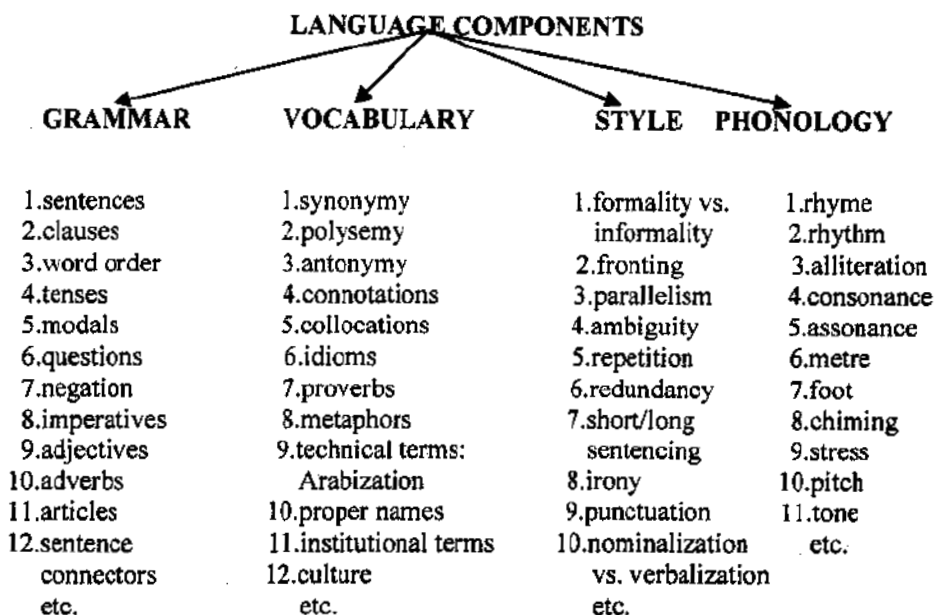


Figure1. Representation of the linguistic components of meaning

these components takes part in formulating the meaning, which the translator conveys from the source to the target language. In addition, each of them has an effect on both the source text and the production of the target text during the translation process. It could be concluded that all the linguistic components in the source text have to be analyzed by the translator and represented through the process of translation in the product target text.

Is it the culture or cultural context?

Languages are used in societies for interacting and

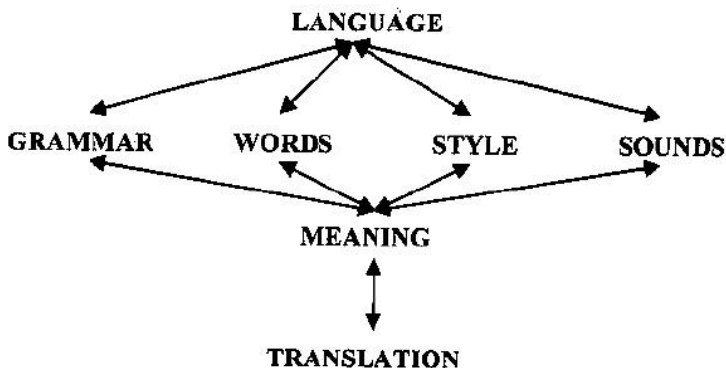


Figure2. Transforming linguistic components

communicating purposes between the members of one society, for instance, the Arabic language, or for global communication between different cultures, for instance, the English language. Each society has its own cultural expressions such as proverbs, which differ from other societies. These cultural expressions based on images for experiences, which are conveyed through generations. Translating cultural expressions requires more understanding and cultural knowledge because they reflect a certain side of a specific social environment which they still live within. Thus, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) state that ‘proverbs are metaphors we live by’.

Proverbs

The most accurate representations of national culture for any nation are proverbs. Some scholars have called them as the banks of knowledge. Meider (2004, p.1) says ‘Proverbs fulfill the human need to summarize experiences and observations into nuggets of wisdom that provide ready-made comments on personal relationships and social affairs’. Proverbs present effective formulation of strategies for social

communication in the same nation through generations and cultural representative of the nation to other foreign cultures.

Iraq represents the homeland of ancient civilizations from the days of the Sumerians, Babelions, Ashurains till the modern era. Iraqi proverbs as other proverbial systems in the world represent knowledge and a bank of experience which taught Iraqis lessons in culture, literature, and traditions from one generation to another. Abu-Haidar (1991, p. 4 cited in Honeck, 1997) states that the first study on Iraqi proverbs appeared in 1901 in 'The journal of the American oriental society'. It was entitled 'Al-Amthal Al-Smiya Fi L-bilad Al Iraqiyya' by Yusif Ghanima, the study also published later on in the Al-Mashriq printing house.

Norrick (1985) and Honeck (1997) presented the most valid and adopted criteria for proverbs. It can be briefly stated as follows;

A- (Self-contained): Proverbs are self-contained and none of their grammatical units can be replaced with others. This criterion will enable researchers to distinguish the proverbs from proverbial phrases.

B- (**Prepositional statements**): Abrahams (1972, cited in Norrick, 1985) and Meider (1995) state that proverbs as statements must at least present one logical preposition. This means units which can be analyzed as predicate and or more arguments.

C- (**Grammatical sentences**): Other scholars dealt with the syntactic formulation of the sentence. Scholars from Abrahams (1968) to Mieder (1997) agree that proverbs have to be a complete sentence according to the norms of its language and culture and this criterion may differ from one language to another.

The above criteria have been established by English scholars on the international proverbial systems. Gerd de ley (1998) and many other Arab scholars such as Keer Allah (1983) found that these criteria apply to the Arabic and Iraqi proverbial systems as well.

Those scholars classified proverbs into two main categories, (A) Figurative proverbs, (B) Non-figurative proverbs. This study deals with the first category of the proverb system (figurative) which needs more effort and has more problems that present the main challenge for the translators during the cognation process. The figurative type is embedded with five sub-

categories, but the study will discuss two of them; 1- Metaphoric proverbs, 2- Metonymic proverbs.

1- Metaphoric proverbs.

A Metaphoric proverb is the most difficult type of proverbs because there is no relation between the literal meaning of the proverb and its intended meaning. KeerAllah (1983, p.6) and Honeck (1997, p.108) state that metaphoric proverb is formulated when the nominal statement interacts with another constitution to formulate a proverb, for example, the first part is 'Favor will as surely perish as life' and the second is 'Fair play is jewel'.

2- Metonymic proverbs.

This type of proverb is more understandable for the users within the same culture as well as the foreign one. The reason is that one of its constituents has a literal relation to the intended meaning. For example, 'Who has a fair wife needs more than two eyes' the word 'eye' is related to 'sight'.

Research Questions

What are the challenges which post-graduate students may encounter during translating Iraqi proverbs from Arabic into English?

- 1- Are they linguistic difficulties in finding accurate equivalent expressions in the target language?
- 2- Are the phonological challenges caused by the linguistic or cultural differences between the source and the target languages?
- 3- Are they results cause by the lack of cultural knowledge in the source or the target cultures?
- 4- Does the typology of the proverb effects on the accuracy of the translation?

The research hypotheses can be stated as follows:-

- The context facilitates the translation process of the proverbs both qualitatively and quantitatively.
- The cultural dimensions (source and target) present the most serious challenge for novice translators during the process of translation.

Research methodology

The research will use thinking aloud methodology to get the data from the samples of the study and

transcribe them in forms of protocols in order to analyze them later. Oster (2001) defines this methodology as 'a technique in which students verbalize their thoughts as they read and thus bring into the open the strategies they are using to understand a text'. It can be described as one of the higher techniques to assess the high level of thinking processes, at the same time it can be used to study the individual differences in performing the same task (Oslo et.al, 1984). This is what is going to be through using Iraqi proverbs as materials for testing four different subjects through this study.

Participants

The research is based on students from translation department. Four students have been selected. Two are Iraqi nationality. The others are one Jordanian and one from Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Moreover, the subjects dealt with translation problems and strategies previously in their undergraduate study. Therefore, having such an experience will present a real challenge and scale their abilities before going through this field in future work.

The demographic background information about the students, including their gender, age, the number of

years working in translation are shown as the following:-

1-	Gender	Male 3 Female 1
2-	Age	25-35 3 35-40 1
3-	Nationality	Iraqi 2 Jordanian 1 Saudi 1
4-	Translation experience	1-3 1 More than 3 3
5-	Translated proverbs previously	Yes 3 No 1
Total number of participants		4 students

Table1. Demographic backgrounds of the participants

Materials

Cultural expressions contain many different forms such as proverbs, idioms, etc.. All these forms cannot be placed in one task to be investigated, because of the typological and characteristics varieties of these forms which require different processing tasks. Thus, this

study adopted one form of the Iraqi cultural expressions 'Proverbs' in order to limit the range of varieties and present more accurate thinking aloud responses.

It used twenty proverbs of two typologies, ten metaphoric and ten metonymic. The main reasons for this selection are; Firstly, they are the first two types in the KeerAllah's book and International Dictionary of Proverbs (1998) which had been adopted as the most popular Iraqi classifier for proverbs. Secondly, there is a variety in the range of challenges between metaphoric and metonymic proverbs, because of their typology. This represents the most rhetorical challenge for the translators in translating cultural expressions.

Comprehensibility and the Cognitive processing

Translation process implies a set of cognitive functions starting with the comprehension of the S.T, interpreting, reformulating the S.T in the T.T. (Wilss, 1994). Cultural expressions include more detailed and complicated cognitive processes. The processing efforts of the subjects depended mainly on two factors; firstly one is their previous knowledge or related situations stored in long-term memory (LTM) about this proverb. Secondly, the cultural complexity of the

proverbs itself, because proverbs are heavy loaded terms which are embedded within their own culture.

This way of interacting aroused some information within the (LTM) within the minds of the subjects and in some cases related the new contextual information with their own cultural background knowledge store in their (LTM) from a long time about both the source and target cultures. The result of these interactions presented more chances for adequate translation in the T.L using different translation strategies to convey the characteristics of the proverb which Norrick (1985) and Honeck (1997) mentioned from the source into the target culture.

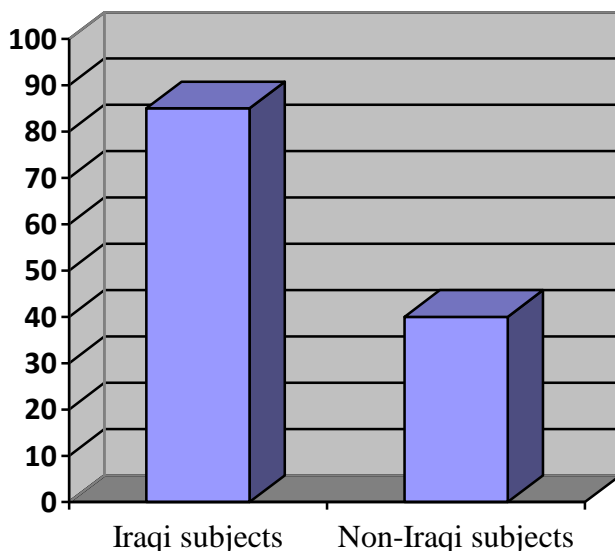


Figure3. Students' familiarity of proverbs without context

Figure No.3 clarifies that the degree of students' familiarity with the proverbs from both types, whereas the Iraqi subjects had 85% of familiarity and the students did not have noticeable difficulty during the translation process because of their understanding of the proverbs. However, the non-Iraqi subjects had less

than this rate of familiarity and they only had 40% which is due to their limited cultural knowledge in the Iraqi proverbs in addition to the effects of the proverb types as in the case of metaphoric proverbs.

The contextual effects start from the moment the translator reads in the context in which the proverb is embedded. This contextual information interacts with the existing assumptions within the translator's mind in one of three ways; strengthen existing knowledge, contradicting with the existing knowledge or compounding with it (Brown et.al, 2004).

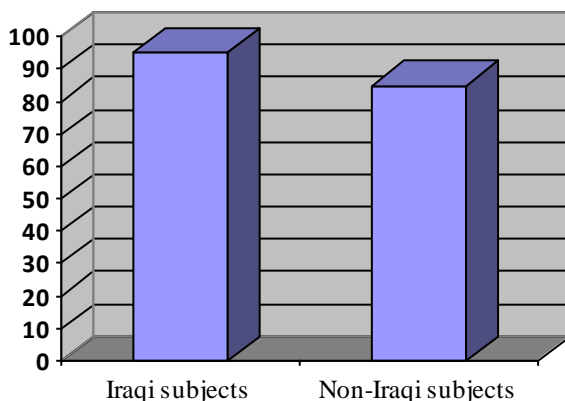


Figure4. Students' familiarity of proverbs with context

The above figure No.4 clarifies the effects of the context in changing the rates of the students' successful translations to higher levels. Iraqi subjects had 95% successful translations while non-Iraqi subjects had 85%. It appears that the context had an effect on both of the two groups of subjects but the main effect was on the non-Iraqi subjects. Their lack of knowledge had been completed by the existence of the context which changes their rates of successful translations for the proverbs from 40% without context to 85% for proverbs with context.

Assessment of students' translations

One of the aims of this study is to have a descriptive assessment for students' translations. Therefore, all of the students' translations had been sent to an Iraqi professional translator. The translations were sent without any information about the subjects such as their names or origins in order to have a valid objective decision for them. The professional translator was asked to assess them in order to find successful and unsuccessful translations in addition to the accuracy of translations.

Thus, the professional translator's assessments were compared with the strategies that the students used in translating each proverb, which was stated in the

retrospective interview to be more objective in analyzing subjects' choices for translations strategies. The rates of accuracy in the translation had been measured firstly according to the proverb existence with or without context, i.e. how the context enabled them to present accurate translations, for the adequate answers as shown in the following table:

Subjects	Proverbs	Metonymic	Metaphoric	Frequency of adequate translations
Iraqi subjects	Proverbs with a context	10	9	95 %
	Proverbs without a context	9	8	85 %
Non-Iraqi subjects	Proverbs with a context	8	9	85 %
	Proverbs without a context	5	5	50 %

Table2. Students' successful translations of Iraqi proverbs

Table No.2 indicated that Iraqi students had the biggest rate of translation adequacy of 95% for the proverbs within a context. Also, they achieved 85 % of adequate translations for the proverbs without a context. These rates are due to the Iraqi students' cultural background, in addition to the proper use of cultural equivalence strategy more than literal or other types of translation strategies. On the contrary, non-Iraqi students achieved 85% adequate translations for Iraqi proverbs within their context. They had 50% of adequate answers for translating proverbs without their context of use. Moreover, the strategy which the non-Iraqi student used mainly was a literal translation and other strategies came after.

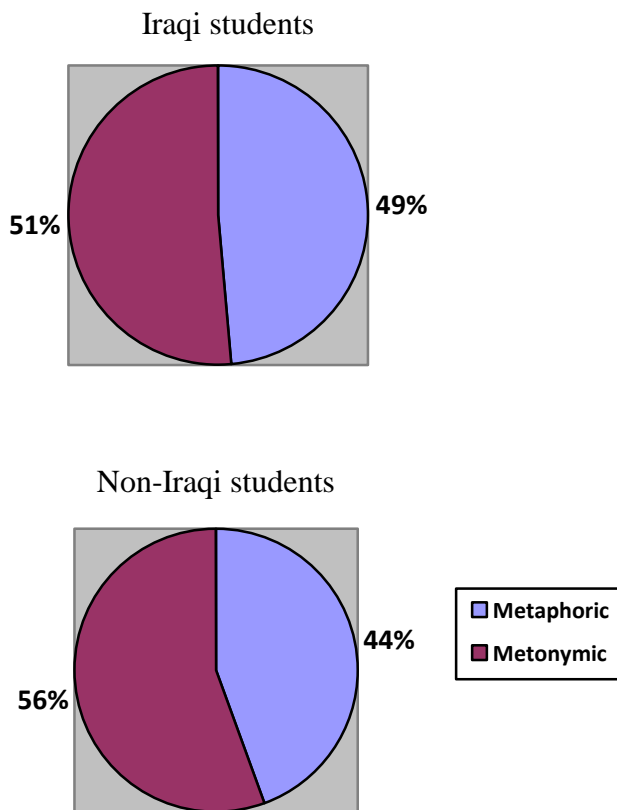


Figure5. Students' adequacy according to proverb types

Furthermore, another description for the students' accuracy in translating Iraqi proverbs can be built according to the proverbs type as shown in figure No.5. There is a noticeable difference between the adequate answers of Iraqi and non-Iraqi students because of the types of proverbs. Iraqi students had a close rate in translating metonymic and metaphoric proverbs from 51% for the metonymic and 49% for the metaphoric proverbs.

These rates illustrate that students from the Iraqi cultural background had the same effect on their understanding for both types of proverbs because they were already familiar with their meaning. Also, the existence of the context did not facilitate their translations, i.e., it did not have a direct effect on facilitating the challenges which they faced during the translation process. However, non-Iraqi students had been affected by the difference in proverb types. The rate of accuracy for the metaphoric proverbs was 44% where the formal meaning differs from the intended meaning, while the metonymic was 56% which has a relation between the connotation and denotation meaning. In addition, higher rates of adequate translations had been achieved by the existence of the context.

The existence of the context facilitates their choice for translation strategy and words in the target language. All of this enabled them to have enough background knowledge of the Iraqi proverbs that they were translating. After all, it seems that such a study can be used as an assessment tool for novice translators' competence as well as representing the proper practical method to develop translation students' knowledge and skills in dealing with cultural expressions through practical methods. The next subsections will discuss the challenges and explain the process of translation according to proverb types and if they are with or without context according to the rates of the subjects' successful translations which showed in the professional translator assessment.

Discussing students' strategies from Arabic to English

This section represents the varied number of the strategies that the students used in translating Iraqi metaphoric and metonymic proverbs into English with and without their context of usage. Both Iraqi and non-Iraqi students used different strategies in their translations. Their decisions for adopting each translation strategy were based on many factors, such as their understanding for the proverbs, the existence

of a close equivalent in the target culture, the challenges that they had during the translating process. In order to present an accurate quantitative description of the strategies that the students used in their translations, the following table shows them in detail:

Strategies of Translation	Non-Iraqi subjects		Iraqi subjects		Total number of usage	Rates
	Subject 1	Subject 2	Subject3	Subject 4		
Superordination	0	0	1	1	2	3 %
Neutral word	0	1	0	1	2	3 %
Cultural equivalence	5	6	10	9	30	47 %
Literal translation	6	6	6	5	23	35 %
Paraphrasing with related words	2	1	1	2	6	9 %
Paraphrasing with unrelated words	1	0	0	1	2	3 %

Table3. Students' strategies in translating Iraqi proverbs into English

Table No.3 shows that in translating Iraqi cultural expressions from Arabic into English, the cultural equivalence strategy came in the first position and achieved the highest number for the usage of 47 % from the total number of the strategies used by the subjects. While the literal translation strategy came in the second position which was 35% from the total rate of strategies used in translating Iraqi metaphoric proverbs. In contrast, other strategies such as paraphrasing with related words, unrelated words and superordinate came in 3-9% of usage.

The cultural knowledge of the source language and the accurate situation of usage in the target culture, which Iraqi students had with respect to their native Iraqi proverbs, enabled them to use the cultural equivalence strategy mainly in translating metonymic and metaphoric proverbs within the context in shorter time and less effort than the non-Iraqi students. In addition, they used this strategy for translating most of the metonymic proverbs without a context. Because, they already use them in their daily life, so the context did not influence their translations.

Conclusion

The current study represents the first step in gaining a more practical understanding of the challenges posed

by translating figurative language between English and Arabic. Also, it contributed to extending our knowledge of how the context interacts with the proverb processing in translation and how this affected in the different natures of proverbs involved in the study. The heavy loaded rhetorical expressions in the study represented by the proverbs created a long time ago made this interaction varied from Iraqi to non-Iraqi participants.

The results suggest that the translators who were the subjects of the study really found considerable challenges in arriving at an appropriate interpretation of the proverbs in the Arabic language. Their familiarity with Iraqi proverbs was somehow low, and their ability to interpret unfamiliar proverbs was limited.

This is mainly due to the fact that proverbs are rhetorical and colorful expressions of the language whose meaning is not obvious from the meaning of the constituent words, especially in the case of metaphoric proverbs. Hence, one way to understand and interpret the proverb in a translation is to present it within context.

The study suggests that the context has a vital role in facilitating the interpretation of Iraqi proverbial

expressions. Non-Iraqi students' translations of de-contextualized proverbs usually result in unsatisfactory outcomes. So, they should take into consideration their situation of use because it is apparently essential to make the adequate translation. This was demonstrated by their translations for metaphoric and metonymic proverbs within a context. In addition, the findings explained that students do not use accurate strategies that may help to achieve appropriate guesses. In their translations, they keep to literal translation. In contrast, paraphrasing and cultural substitution strategies were sometimes used.

Iraqi subjects succeed in presenting adequate translations for both metaphoric and metonymic types with and without their context of use. While, non-Iraqi subjects failed to achieve the close rate of successful translations to Iraqi only once, as in the cases for metaphoric and metonymic proverbs without a context. Consequently, the use of the context within these two types of proverbs suggests for the second time, the proposed hypotheses that it can facilitate the process of translation for translators on both the interlingual and intralingual levels, i.e. translators from the same source language but from different cultural backgrounds and the translators from foreign

languages in the cases of other language pairs. This was the main reason for using two Iraqi subjects and two others from different Arab countries.

Another way for the acquisition of cultural understanding 'cultural awareness' by the translators for a source or target language can be found in different methods like, learning about intercultural varieties in teaching culture classes or wide self-reading about the culture that assists the translators in the process of translating proverbs. However, such methods take more time and effort for the translator unlike the use of the context which takes less time and effort for cultural acquisition.

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