



Strategies Used in Arabic - English Expression Translation amidst Machine Translation

Shahab Ahmad Al Maaytah

Associate professor

Department of Languages and Humanities, Applied College,
King Faisal University, Alhafof, The Eastern Province, Saudi Arabia.

Salmaaytah@kfu.edu.sa

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Abstract

The study aims to investigate the strategies diligent engaged with Expression Translation . The Arabic language, with its rich history and deep cultural roots, is spoken by millions around the world. Known for its poetic and expressive nature, Arabic is filled with phrases and expressions which convey a wide range of sensation and meaningful. Whether you're a language fanatic, a tourist, or someone looking to concatenate with Arabs communities, understanding some of the most famous phrases and expressions in the Arabic language can be incredibly beneficial. In this paper tries to explore these phrases, their meanings, and their cultural significance expressions phrases are multiword idioms and its meaning cannot be translated verbatim because idioms are an expression very peculiar fixed non compositional expressions that are not only connected to the language-but also to the culture belong to the interchange between culture and language. This makes the translation a little complicated where the precise translation of the expression is possible if there is an counterpart in the target language but when the equivalent idiom is not available in the target language *it has to be paraphrased in such a manner* using certain strategies so that meaning will be clear while at the same time the translation shouldn't get an impact to cultural aspects that revive an important role.. In this paper some indications are given on how Arabic expressions can be translated into English using machine translation).

Key words: machine translation, idioms, expressions translation Strategies , language

Introduction

Expressions used in language to make natural-language more brilliant picturesque and emotional, and this is the natural way in which people speak the language. Individual words in the idioms do not express the meaning that the entire idiom conveys. Therefore, the translation



of an idiom cannot follow the principles or strategies used in translating a simple sentence such as 'هذا ابي' which means 'this is my father'.

Figurative expressions that are made up of "at least two words which cannot be translated literally and which function as a unit semantically" (**Beekman and Callow 1974: 121**). Though idioms are used both in spoken as well as written languages, mostly are typically used in spoken language (**Maxos, 2003:4**). There are many different categories of idioms (**Leah, 2014**) and Arabic conversations are full of expressions such as ' (لم اعد اقوى على الاحتمال انتظرك بفارغ) الصبر (Maxox, 2003) and it means 'I can't take it anymore. I'm waiting impatiently for you. for someone or something'.

When an idiom is translated perfectly it does not look like a translation but a smooth transition of words from the SL to TL due to the style and voice that carries the meaning that is close to the SL but very natural in TL. In this paper the expressions and meanings of some Arabic idioms that have an English equivalent and a few that do not have an equivalent in English are taken as examples to show how translation gets affected and what strategies can be used to get the nearest English equivalent for the translation of an Arabic Idiom into English.

Definition of Idioms

Many scholars have defined idioms in their own words and in this section a few significant definitions have been discussed. One of the criteria used for defining an idiom is that it is an expression whose meaning is unpredictable based on the individual words used in the idiom (**Allan 2001:126, Cruse 1986: 37**). Even a two word phrase such as 'stand up' can be considered as an idiom as per this definition and so **Pulman 1993** states that 'multi-word ends' of a phrase alone is not enough to consider the phrase as an idiom though it is an essential aspect of an idiom.

To define an expression as an idiom the characteristics accepted by scholars have changed over the years (**Reijonen, 2006**). Some scholars (**Hockett, 1964; Katz and Postal, 1963; Makkai, 1972**) use the formal characteristics to define an idiom and this includes the grammatical form such as morphemes which are single words whereas 'lexical idioms' and 'phrasal idioms' are two types of idioms defined by Katz and Postal who argue that the literal meaning and the idiomatic meanings are completely different for these words or multiword expressions. Makkai (1972) defined idioms as expressions that have at least two words but this cannot be accepted as many simple expressions or phrases will also have to be considered as idioms.

An approach called the generative transformational approach was used by **Fraser (1970)** and **Wienreich (1969)** in order to study about idioms. According to Wienreich (1969) idioms are phrases that have the same meanings literally and figuratively, which restricts many idioms from being considered as idioms. Fraser (1990) states that idioms can have variations and developed a scale which shows the degree up to which an idiom can be pressed to get a different meaning. **Fernando (1996)** uses both the degrees of variance as well as the level of



transparency of an idiom in order to define it. Moreover, both Fraser and Fernando defined idioms based on the characteristics of the idiom. which give a precise definition.

Expressions include different cultural aspects and which are considered as figure of speech (**Shojaei, 2012**). According to Oxford Dictionary, “an idiom is a group of words established by usage as having a meaning not deducible from those of the individual words”. As idioms are considered as fixed expressions they cannot be divided into their individual elements for getting the actual meaning. of the expression (**Němcová, 2013**). Furthermore, an idiom has two important functions namely pragmatic and referential. The pragmatic function helps the receiver to show an interest as this appeals to the senses whereas the referential function is described as “a mental process or state, a concept, a person, an object, a quality or an action more comprehensively and concisely than is possible in literal or physical language” **Newmark (1988)**.

Idioms have also ; been defined by various scholars. Keeping the purpose of the current study mindful , an expression can be considered as an idiom that has at least two words and the meaning of the expression cannot be deduced or predicted from the meanings of based on the individual words that make up the idiom.

Classification of idioms تحت هذا العنوان تأكد من الترتيب صحيح ام لا اقصد *a b c d*

Different scholars have classified idioms based on various factors that they have studied in their research. **Moon (1998)** states that the term ‘idiom’ is used as a common expression for a variety of multiword expressions whether the expression is opaque or transparent. Idioms have been classified into three types namely Pure-idioms, Semi-idioms and Literal-idioms by **Fernando (1996)** based on the transparency of meaning variance of the idiom. Pure-Idioms do not change their meaning and are opaque in nature. (give examples) In a semi-literal idiom at least there is one element that is non-literal in nature and these idioms according to Fernando are not fully opaque but are partially opaque (give examples). The last type in Fernando’s classification is ‘Literal-idioms’ which are less complex semantically and the variations are restricted to a certain degree. (give examples)

In general idioms are classified into five types (**Adelnia and Dastjerd, 2011**) In in this study the distinction of idiomatic and non-idiomatic expressions have been made by the scholars:- The categories are as follows:

- a. Colloquialisms: These expressions are not used in formal writing or speech as one uses in daily language. Some examples of idioms used in daily spoken English are a) ‘pull a rabbit out of a hat’ which means doing something unexpected b) ‘you rock’ meaning you are great.



Even Arabic also has a number of phrases and idioms used in colloquial language and a few examples are given below:

- Let's have some fun: يعط في نوم عميق / He's out for the count
- The axe came down on the head: الفأس وقع بالراس / The fat is in the fire
- The situation is electrified: الوضع جدا منكهرب / the situation and atmosphere are Tense
- Has a long tongue: طويل لسان / Impudent
- Has a light blood : دم خفيف / Charming

There are some interesting Jordanian idiom used when one wants to show that he can dominate the opponents or other players in a game or in sports. اكله بدون ملح (bakloo bidoon milH) and this idiom's literal meaning is "eat him without salt" but is used to show that the speaker is very strong and can He can eliminate it quickly.

- b. Proverbs: These are short sentences that are used in everyday speech to convey a message in a simple but powerful way. Examples a) all that glitters is not gold,
- c. b) like a pot having found its bonnets. Similarly in Arabic also proverbs are used in spoken language. For example :
- a) طنجرة ولقت غطاها
- b) وافق شن طبقة
- d. Slang: The words used in slang cannot be used in formal language. Example a) chick refers to a young woman, b) Bloke refers to man
- Some examples of slang words used in Arabic
- a.
- على حقة القبر meaning 'broken down' used for people or objects.
- b.
- شخص ملح (mlaHlaH) meaning 'Lively and resourceful, enterprising.
- e. Allusions: These are words that refer to a myth, place, event, work of art and work of literature and these words are used directly or indirectly. Some examples of allusions are
- a. A house of cards - This is an allusion that shows how flimsy or weak the arrangement is. When children build a toy house with playing cards then it is not something that is considered strong.
- b. A shot in the dark – English men enjoyed shooting wild animals and this idiom comes from the fact that one cannot shoot perfectly in the dark. So if by chance something happens perfectly then this idiom is used.



الزينة –literal meaning-May God let us hear good news- used when some embarrassing news or secrets are revealed

رمضان مبارك –literal meaning ‘Ramamdaan is generous’ (Ramadan Mubarak)asking the other person’s pardon for not offering any food to eat during the fasting period.

f. Phrasal verbs: A phrasal verb can either contain a verb along with a preposition, or an adverb or sometimes the verb can also have both the preposition and adverb in a phrasal verb. Example

a. Give up – This idiom means relinquish and stay strong

b. put up with – The meaning of this idiom is ‘tolerate other people

In Arabic there are number of phrasal verbs used in both spoken as well as written language. For example فاضي (faaDy) has a number of meanings which is purely based on the context alone. This can either be an adjective or a verb and this is used both in Modern Standard Arabic and also in Levantine Arabic. The several meanings it conveys are empty, not occupied, vacant and also not busy.

There is another interesting idiomالمكان فاضي اليوم (il-makan faaDee il-yom) which literally means ‘the place is empty today’. The noun, المكان refers to the feminine gender and this shows that gender of the adjective can also be changed. And this gives a different meaning.

Strategies used by interpreters to translate expressions

Human translators used certain strategies to translate idioms from SL to TL and these strategies have been studied by Baker (1992) and categorized into four major types.

a. Using a similar idiom in TL

According to Baker (1992) If a similar idiom in TL is used in ~~while~~ translation then the meaning of the text does not get altered and so the reader does not find any problem in the translated version of the original text. For example يعطي الضوء الاخضر in Arabic means ‘To give a green signal’ or اصطاد في الماء العكر in Arabic means literary is to fish in troubled waters. There are many such similar idioms in English are having the same meaning as in Arabic and these idioms can be used in translation of Arabic idioms to English. If both the meaning and form of the idioms in the source language are not changed during translation then the sense of the text is not lost and so the reader finds the easy flow of target language, not interrupting the understanding of the whole text

b. Idioms with Similar meaning but in different forms

Arabic language has some expressions that have matching English expressions but the way it is expressed is not the same. Translators sometimes use these idioms in order to transmit the meaning in the target language so that the translation does not deviate much



from the contents of the source language. For example *إنك لا تجني العنب من الشوك* can be translated in English as ‘one can’t get blood from stone’. The literal meaning is ‘You do not reap the grape of thorns’

Similarly, *عاد بخفي حنين* can be translated into English as ‘empty handed’ but just as in the example above the way it is expressed in Arabic is not the same as in English. In this expression means ‘came back’ and *(بخفي)* means ‘it’s a name used for a kind of shoes old name’.

c. Borrowing the idiom from the source language

Like loan words there are phrases and idioms that are also borrowed from Arabic into English. One of the most commonly used idioms that was borrowed from Arabic is “The last straw”. The original version was “The straw that broke the camel’s back” which means that a person’s patience has come to an end. The original phrase in Arabic is “*al-qasha alathee qassamat dhahra al baeer*” and its equal expression is “the straw that broke the back of the camel.” *"القشة التي قصمت ظهر البعير"*

Another common idiom in English is ‘a camel’s nose’ which comes from an old Arab proverb that says when an Arab allowed his camel to just get its nose into a tent it ended up with the Arab moving out of the tent because the camel occupied the entire tent over a short period. Thus, something that looks as a simple act can turn out to be an adverse action in a short span of time.

d. Omitting Idioms

Baker’s final strategy is to completely avoid an idiom that does not have a match in the target language. There are many idioms in Arabic that do not have an equivalent in English and also cannot be translated into English due to many factors including the fact that they are culture- specific.

Some examples from spoken Arabic are from Barakbits, 2017:

- 1) **Maqtoo’ min shajara** *مقطوع من شجرة* – Literal meaning: ‘cut from a tree’. When a person has no family or is an orphan this expression is used to explain that he has no family tree to be identified with.
- 2) **Eid wahda matsa’afsh** *يد واحدة ماتسقفش* - Literal meaning: ‘one hand doesn’t clap’. The figurative meaning is that a problem is caused by more than one person or it can also be used to express that everybody in a team has to work for anything positive to materialize. This essentially means that if something is to work, cooperation from all parties is necessary, usually said to encourage teamwork.

Similarly, in Quran there are many idioms that cannot be translated perfectly as Classical Arabic is a language that has words with a variety of meanings and each meaning has a different level of intensity. The spiritual sense that is to be translated is not easy unless the translator is aware of both language and religion apart from the differences in both the cultures.



Machine Translation

The use of computers to translate texts from Source Language to Target language is known as Machine translation (Koehn and Senellart, 2010) and translation of idioms is not easy (Adelina and Dastjerdi, 2011). Machine translation has advanced technologically since 1950 (Hutchins, 2005) and the modification of statistical machine translation that had been basically developed by IBM has undergone a lot of sophistication in order to get results that are as perfect as possible in the target language. In the later models of SMT the translations have been conducted on phrases or on a string of words, which are available in bilingual corpora and a few universities have been supported and funded by Google Corporation (Hutchins, 2005). This technology needs processing power because each day free translation websites get a large number of translation requests; Google gets more than a billion translation requests (Specia, 2012) which is a very large volume.

Translation memories were used to store large database of translated phrases so that the machine could easily translate large amounts of texts faster than in the earlier stages when translation of source text to target text consumed too much time (Mohammed, 2011). Translation memories are used by various companies that are global in nature as these memories are cost-effective and also consistent (Seljan and Pavuna, 2006). These are used in the neural network in order to increase the efficiency of translation (Sukhbaatar, Weston, and Fergus; 2015). Statistical machine translation produces many different translations for each sentence giving the user more choices to choose from which is a paradigm shift from the previous rule based translation methods (Vashee, 2013).

Artificial Intelligence and Translation

Since 2014 there have been further changes in translation technology. Earlier Machine translation followed a system called the translation memories that enhanced the quality of output in machine translation but since 2014 the concept of neural translation has been designed that can build a network of artificial neural networks, which works on a very high volume of translation memories (Bahdanau, Cho and Bengio, 2014). In this system a single network will be built to give the best possible translation which consists of a number of encoders and decoders. These encoders-decoders produce translation of the source language into a fixed-length sentence in the target language. Statistical models are based on the biological models where layers of artificial neurons are created (Tu et. al, 2017) therefore, this system uses lesser number of components as compared to the earlier statistical machine translation which helps in speeding up the translation process.

Discussion

The current research discloses that Arabic as an idiomatic language has various categories of expressions such as: expressions, colloquialisms, proverbs, slang, allusions and phrasal verbs.



In addition, there are some strategies that are used by interpreters to translate of expressions and idioms namely; *using a similar idiom in the target language* , expressions *idioms with similar meaning but in different shapes*, *borrowing the expressions from the source language* and *ignoring idioms*.

Finally, Machine translation plays a crucial role while translating of expressions idioms from Arabic to English especially in the time of technology.

Conclusion

The beauty of language is in its capability to communicate any expression and if the language has idiomatic expressions then the quality of the language is considered to be very high. Arabic is a affluent language and the expressions in Arabic make the language very appealing. Most people who speak the language use expression inherently without thinking about the idioms they are using from the time they learn to speak the language. Expressions are a natural part of languages , spoken or written.

In the field of machine translation major changes have taken place from the time of commencement in the 1950s till now but there are particular difficulties in translation even in this decade especially the translation of expressions form Arabic to English. In order to fetch the bestead translation I suggest a few suggestions. Firstly the machine translation system must be follow by post editing by a translator with an abilities and experiences able to segregate the phrases from idioms. Once the idioms are segregated the next process by the software is to find out the idiom's classification and give a suitable translation that is taken out from database available in the translation memory. Machine translation- can be used to get both the naturalness as well as giving the correct meaning of the text. If the Arabic expressions do not have a compatible English expressions then the machine should be used to output the paraphrased text so that the final output does not have any errors. This would help in acquiring the simplicity and flow of language in the translated text that is as accurate as probable .

conflict of interest

The author declare no conflict of interest

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