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The Problems of Translating Mosul's Proverbs From Arabic into English

A B S T R A C T

This paper aims at examining difficulties translators encounter when attempting to translate Mosul's proverbs into English.

Proverbs are words combined together to form larger semantic units which are encoded by the speaker and decoded by the hearer by means of their underlined knowledge of the language itself.

Proverbs are culturally bound expressions and this means that there is no categorical or decisive TL counterpart for the SL proverb when rendered from Arabic into English, in addition to the difficulties resulting from rendering the proverbs from Mosul's dialect into English, since there are certain expressions and terminology peculiar to this dialect that need to be explained in Arabic language before translating them into English.

To achieve the objectives of this research, a number of proverbs will be handed over to a number of translation students to conduct the task of translation. Based on the outcomes of their renderings, a thorough analysis of the detected translation difficulties and problems will be made.

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The problem

Translating proverbs from Arabic into English poses serious problems for the translator due to the linguistic, stylistic, and cultural gaps between English and Arabic.

These gaps will make the task of rendering the intended SL meaning into the TL a difficult and complicated task.

Aims of the study

- 1- Defining the problems and difficulties associated with the translation of Mosul's proverbs into English.
- 2- Assessing the translation of some Mosul's proverbs into English language.

Procedures of the study

For the purpose of attaining the objectives of the study, the following procedures shall be adopted:

- 1- Selecting certain problematic Mosul's proverbs for analysis.
- 2- Assigning the task of translating the selected proverbs to a number of students in the translation department to conduct the task of translation.
- 3- Conducting a thorough analysis of the student's translations to define the main translation problems and difficulties.
- 4- Proposing alternative renderings if the student's ones proved inappropriate.

The model adopted

Baker (1992) model of translating proverbs and idioms has been adopted for this study since it provides an appropriate framework for the translation of proverbs.

1- Definition of translation

Translation has been defined and viewed differently by different scholars. Some define it in terms of equivalence, while others define it in terms of transference of meaning.

For Ray (1962: 187), translation means "the transference of meaning from one language into another".

Savory (1968: 34), on the same course with Newmark(1982:7), (1992:27) conceives translation as:

"A craft that attempts to replace a written message and / or statement in another language".

Farghal abd Shunnaq(1999: 2) go along with this view saying that translation is "often regarded as a project for transferring meaning from one language to another".

Catford (1965: 1), Nida and Taber(1974: 12), Mcguire(1980: 29), Aziz (1989: 258), and Aziz and Lataiwish(2000: 61); who follow the equivalence – based approach, view translation as a process of substituting a text in one language for a text in another.

De Beaugrande(1978: 13) believes that translation should not be studied as a comparison and contrast of two texts, but as a process of interaction between author, translator, and reader of the translation.

According to Schaffner(2000), translation requires "as awareness of and conscious reflection on all the relevant factors for the production of a target text that appropriately fulfills its specified function for its target addressees" (Schaffner, 2000: 146).

2- Definition of proverbs

According to Wikipedia, "proverbs are defined as a simple, concrete, traditional saying that expresses a truth based on common sense or experience. Proverbs are often metaphorical and use formulaic language. Collectively, they form a genre of folklore".

As for Collins dictionary, "a proverb is a short sentence that people often quote which gives advice or tells you something about life".

Cambridge dictionary definition of proverbs is, "a short sentence, etc., usually known by many people, stating something commonly experienced or giving advice".

So, we can say that a proverb is a brief, simple, and popular saying, or a phrase that gives advice and effectively embodies a commonplace truth based on practical experience or common sense.

A proverb may have an allegorical message behind its odd appearance.

The reason of popularity is due to its usage in spoken language, as well as in folk literature (baker: 92).

3- Uses of proverbs

To tackle the uses of proverbs it is essential to discuss the role of context in understanding the meaning of proverbs.

Within this perspective, Firth (1926) asserts that in order to understand the meaning of a proverb, one should account for the social situation in which the proverb is used.

Such a meaning cannot be derived from a literal or bald translation of the proverb but from the context of its use.

Monye (1990: 3-10) contends that proverbs are used to comment implicitly on everyday experiences and to solve problems.

He confirms that proverbs are used to mask what one says in order to avoid troubles because sometimes people need to mask or encapsulate a message.

Hernadi and Steen (1999: 8) maintain that proverbs increase the efficiency of human cognition, feelings and the ability to make decisions by helping to filter the mental and communicative processes through which beliefs, feelings and desires are formulated by people.

Proverbs are used to instruct or teach people the importance of following the proper morals and the right behavior and condemning bad or improper behavior.

Proverbs are also used to enable people to identify themselves with their ancestors and to emphasize these ancestors' values in life. Such identification can be made gradually through increasing the use of proverbs (Baker: 92).

Among the other uses of proverbs is that it enhances people's understanding of the values and morals of others.

Proverbs are also used to show agreement or disagreement; i.e. people use proverbs to show whether they agree or not with the social issues presented by social communication. Thus, people may choose the proverb that suits the circumstances at hand.

Moreover, proverbs are used to support or oppose the views of others because proverbs are part of people's culture and reflect their beliefs, feelings and thoughts (Ibid).

4- Proverbs and culture

According to Wikipedia, "Culture is defined as the social behavior and norms found in human societies. Culture is considered a central concept in anthropology, encompassing the range of phenomena that are transmitted through social learning in human societies. Cultural universals are found in all human societies; these include expressive forms like art, music, dance, ritual, religion, and technologies like tool usage, cooking, shelter, and clothing".

According to Cambridge dictionary, "culture is defined as, the way of life, especially the general customs and beliefs of a particular group of people at a particular time".

Culture also can be defined as the defining characteristics and knowledge of a certain group of people which includes language, religion, social habits, music, and arts. From the aforementioned definitions, it's clear that proverbs are considered an essential component of culture which helps to understand the norms and beliefs of that culture. Ferraro (1990) outlines the relationship holding between proverbs and culture:

"A proverb is a saying that expresses a common truth. It deals with truth simply and concretely and teaches the listener a lesson. It can help to understand a culture and can help to determine if it is a group-or individual oriented culture.

It may also help in understanding what is desired and undesired as well as what is considered correct or incorrect in the culture", Ferraro (1990: 29).

So, we can say that almost in every culture on earth, proverbs are communicated to convey an important type of information and guidelines for community members to follow.

These "words of wisdom" persist through generations, so that each generation would learn about what is regarded as significant by their culture.

As Seidensticker notes, "They say things that people think important in ways that people remember. They express common concerns." Hence,

“proverbs are compact treaties on the values of culture”, Steidensticker (1987: 47).

5- Translation of proverbs

Translation of proverbs is not an easy task since it requires enough linguistic and cultural knowledge in both languages. With relation to cultural aspect and according to House (2009: 11) “Translating is not only a linguistic act, it is also a cultural one”.

In this framework, House stresses the importance of paying enough attention to cultural aspects in translation since proverbs contain cultural and linguistic features.

Baker (2011) on the same course with House also asserts that some proverbs may not have similar equivalents in the target language because the target language culture may not have went through the same events and that could result into certain translation obstacles and difficulties .

As for linguistic aspects, it's clear that translating proverbs requires a linguistic knowledge with relation to finding the correct translation equivalence. In this framework, Nida (1964) proposes two translation methods namely; formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence. Formal equivalence in which the translator focuses attention on the form and content of the SL message, and the dynamic equivalence in which the translator focuses primarily on providing an equivalent effect for the SL message .

6- Difficulties of translating proverbs

Translators attempting to translate proverbs come across many problems and obstacles, some of these are linguistic difficulties while the remaining are cultural ones. The latter problems result from the culturally bound nature of proverbs. In this framework the main task of the translator will be on rendering the literal and figurative meaning of the proverbs in addition to conveying their communicative effect.

Baker (1992) mentions that cultural forms represent a serious problem to translators when they translate texts that contain cultural expressions, proverbs, metaphors, collocations and religious terms. According to Baker, there are certain SL concepts that are ambiguous and unknown to the TL receiver, these concepts may be represented by social norms, customs, traditions and religious beliefs.

Hence, the role of the translator as a mediator between cultures is not only translating meaning but also translating culture. Baker (1992) also mentions that the lack of a TL equivalent for the SL proverb might be a serious problem especially when the SL proverb is a culture specific one.

As for the linguistic difficulties it seems obvious that proverbs in every language have different linguistic structures and that makes the task of translating such expressions a difficult one.

According to Hambleton & Zeniski (2011), the grammatical structure of a certain language may cause problems to translators because every

language has its unique system of word structure that is used to express its ideas.

These differences may cause certain linguistic problems when performing the task of translating proverbs from one language into another.

7- Strategies of translating proverbs

Baker (1992) suggests strategies that help translators when translating proverbs. These strategies are:

A- Using a proverb of similar meaning and form. In this strategy, the translator uses a target language proverb that has a meaning and lexical items similar to the source language.

B- Using a proverb of similar meaning but dissimilar form. In this strategy, the translator uses a TL proverb that has a similar meaning but different lexical form.

C- Translation by paraphrase. This strategy is used when there is no target language equivalent matching the source text proverb or the style of the target text differs from the source text.

D- Translation by omission. In this strategy, the translator deletes the whole proverb because there is no target language proverb matching the source language proverb closely.

As a way of adapting Baker's model, we will add the fifth strategy as follows:

E- Using a proverb of different meaning and form. In this strategy, the translator uses a target language proverb that has meaning and lexical items that differ from the source language proverb.

8- Data analysis

In this section a number of Mosul's proverbs have been handed over to several 4th grade translation students to perform the task of translating these proverbs. Their translation versions will be analyzed and assessed to pinpoint the translation errors and difficulties encountered.

If the renderings proved inappropriate, an alternative translation will be proposed.

1- تعب ايدك او غجلك ولا تتعب لسينك

SL text	تعب ايدك او غجلك ولا تتعب لسينك
Sense of SL proverb	Dependence upon oneself

TL text	Sense of TL proverb	Strategy used	Compatibility of sense
1-Serve yourself	Dependence upon oneself	Using a proverb of similar	+

		meaning and form	
2-Actions speaks louder than words	Actions are more precious than words	Using a proverb of different meaning and form	—
3-Talking is not enough	Actions are more useful than words	Using a proverb of different meaning and form	—
4-Do what you need by your own	Dependence upon oneself	Using a proverb of similar meaning and form	+
5-Don't ask for a chance, create it.	Be proactive and diligent	Using a proverb of different meaning and form	—

Discussion

This proverb means that when someone needs a certain task done, he ought to do it himself without asking anyone else to fulfill his duties.

With relation to the renderings it's clear that translators 1 and 4 renderings have conveyed the intended SL meaning.

Renderings conveyed by translators 2, 3, and 5 are entirely inconsistent with the SL intended meaning.

With regard to translation strategies used, it's clear that translator 1 and 4 have resorted to the strategy of using a proverb of similar meaning and form while translators 2, 3 and 5 have adopted the strategy of using a proverb of different meaning and form.

2-ايخاف من خيالو

SL text	ايخاف من خيالو
Sense of SL proverb	Exaggerated fear

TL text	Sense of TL proverb	Strategy used	Compatibility of sense
1-Coward, scared	Fearful and timid	Translation by paraphrase	+
2-Afraid of one's shadow	Fearful and timid	Using a proverb of similar meaning and form	+
3-He is scared of his own shadow	Fearful and timid	Translation by paraphrase	+
4-Afraid of one's shadow	Fearful and timid	Using a proverb of similar meaning and form	+
5-He is a chicken	Fearful and timid	Translation by paraphrase	+

Discussion

This proverb means that someone is so scary that he sometimes might be afraid even from his own shadow.

This proverb is commonly used among Mosul's population and represents an evident feature of the Mosul's dialect. It is used to describe an individual who is very coward and feeling afraid from anything around him.

Translators 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 have properly conveyed the original meaning. Their renderings were consistent with the SL text meaning.

Translators 2 and 4 have adopted the strategy of using a proverb of similar meaning and form, while translators 1, 3 and 5 have adopted the strategy of translation by paraphrase.

3- إذا مسك التخاب يجي بيدو ذهب

SL text	إذا مسك التخاب يجي بيدو ذهب
Sense of SL proverb	Extreme luck and success

TL text	Sense of TL proverb	Strategy used	Compatibility of sense
1-Master in everything	Skillful and experienced	Using a proverb of different meaning and form	—
2-No sweet without sweat	Goals achieved only through hard working	Using a proverb of different meaning and form	—
3-He has the luck of the Irish	He is so lucky	Using a proverb of similar meaning but dissimilar form	+
4-luck is by his side	He is so lucky	Translation by paraphrase	+
5-He is lucky money maker	He is so lucky	Translation by paraphrase	+

Discussion

This proverb means that some people are so lucky that any work they handle or any task they fulfill will be quite a success and ultimately they will benefit from that task.

Translators 1 and 2 have failed to convey the meaning of the SL text. The original text is describing a lucky individual who is successful in every task or business that he undertakes while the translators are conveying a different meaning in the sense that translator's 1 is delivering the meaning of a skilled and professional individual who masters his work. This meaning is irrelevant to the original meaning.

Translator's 2 rendering on the other hand is conveying a different meaning also in the sense that this rendering circles around the idea that any desired objective needs hard work in returns and that contradicts the

SL original meaning. Translators 3, 4 and 5 have been successful in rendering the original meaning since they have all conveyed the intended SL meaning.

4- اغفع القرش الابيض لليوم الاسود

SL text	اغفع القرش الابيض لليوم الاسود
Sense of SL proverb	Saving money for future needs

TL text	Sense of TL proverb	Strategy used	Compatibility of sense
1-A penny saved is a penny earned	Saving money	Using a proverb of similar meaning but dissimilar form	+
2-Save it for the rainy day	Saving money	Using a proverb of similar meaning but dissimilar form	+
3-A penny a day for the dark day	Saving money	Using a proverb of similar meaning and form	+
4-A penny saved is a penny earned	Saving money	Using a proverb of similar meaning but dissimilar form	+
5-Save for a rainy day	Saving money	Using a proverb of	+

		similar meaning but dissimilar form	
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Discussion

This proverb means that everyone should be aware of the importance of saving money and avoiding unnecessary spending as a way of securing future needs.

A distinctive feature of Mosul city culture is the propensity to save money for fears of future uncertainties and hazards.

This perception is deeply instilled in the city culture and related to history events in which the city has went through certain drastic situations accompanied by lots of sufferings and grievances.

All translators have been successful in rendering the intended SL meaning through adopting different translation strategies as illustrated in the above table .

5- الما يعنف يرقص يقول الاغض عوجا

SL text		الما يعنف يرقص يقول الاغض عوجا
Sense of SL proverb		Blaming others for failure

TL text	Sense of TL proverb	Strategy used	Compatibility of sense
1-It's not my fault but the floor	Blaming others for failure	Using a proverb of similar meaning and form	+
2-Blamer gamer	Blaming others for failure	Using a proverb of similar meaning but dissimilar form	+
3-Excuses excuses	Justification of misconduct	Using a proverb of different	-

		meaning and form	
4-A bad workman always blames his tools	Blaming others for failure	Using a proverb of similar meaning but dissimilar form	+
5-A bad workman always blames his tools	Blaming others for failure	Using a proverb of similar meaning but dissimilar form	+

Discussion

This proverb means that if someone lacks the skill and proficiency to do his own work, will tend to blame others for his failure and misconduct.

With relation to renderings, translator 3 rendering is inconsistent with the SL meaning since it contradicts the intended original meaning. Renderings made by translators 1, 2, 4 and 5 conform to the proverb meaning.

The translators have adopted different strategies to reach the intended SL meaning as shown in the above table.

6- الیحب عېدي عبدا والیحب سمکي عبد الشط

SL text		الیحب عېدي عبدا والیحب سمکي عبد الشط	
Sense of SL proverb		Love has no logic	
TL text	Sense of TL proverb	Strategy used	Compatibility of sense
1-Try with your best to achieve what you want	persistence to achieve goals	Using a proverb of different meaning and form	-
2-Love is blind	Love has no logic	Using a proverb of similar meaning but dissimilar form	+

3-Love leaves no logic	Love has no logic	Using a proverb of similar meaning but dissimilar form	+
4-Love make wonders	Love make miracles	Using a proverb of similar meaning but dissimilar form	+
5-Love is blind but you are not blind to love	Love has no logic	Using a proverb of similar meaning but dissimilar form	+

Discussion

This proverb means that love plays a crucial role in our lives and could easily shape most of human's behavior.

So if someone loves a black woman, he will worship this woman and if he loves a Fish, will surely worship the river. Translator 1 rendering is inconsistent with the SL text meaning.

Translators 2, 3, 4 and 5 renderings conform to the original text meaning, they have resorted to different translation strategies as illustrated in the above mentioned table.

7- الناس بالناس والاقرع يمشط الراس

SL text	الناس بالناس والاقرع يمشط الراس
Sense of SL proverb	Don't gloat over other's misfortunes

TL text	Sense of TL proverb	Strategy used	Compatibility of sense
1-No translation			—
2-No translation			—
3-No translation			—
4-No translation			—
5-He is out of what is trending	Acting in a strange way	Using a proverb of different meaning and form	—

Discussion

This proverb means that some people might gloat or show happiness over other peoples' misfortune or bad luck. Translators 1, 2, 3, and 4 have given no renderings for the proverb, while translator 5 rendering is inconsistent with the SL intended meaning. Therefore, the alternative rendering would be:

Don't rejoice when your enemy falls.

In this rendering, the strategy implemented is that of using a proverb of similar meaning but dissimilar form .

8- ايدق ماي يطلع ماي

SL text	ايدق ماي يطلع ماي
Sense of SL proverb	insisting on doing things that are not doable is pointless

TL text	Sense of TL proverb	Strategy used	Compatibility of sense
1-old habits die hard	It's hard to stop doing things that one has been doing for a long time	Using a proverb of different meaning and form	—
2-The situation can't be changed	It's hard to change reality	Translation by paraphrase	+
3-Calling a chicken a bird wouldn't make it fly	Words can't change reality	Using a proverb of similar meaning but dissimilar form	+
4-Old habits die hard	It's hard to stop doing things that one has been doing for a long time	Using a proverb of different meaning and form	—

5-No translation			—
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Discussion

This proverb means that persistently trying to carry out a task that is not doable or achievable is a waste of time and efforts.

The proverb is used to educate the hearer to avoid insisting on doing things that can't be done appropriately.

With relation to the renderings, translators 1 and 4 renderings are incompatible with the SL text meaning. Translators 2 and 3 renderings are consistent with the SL text meaning.

Translator 5 has provided no rendering for the SL text.

9- الياكل بضغسو ينفع نفسو

SL text	الياكل بضغسو ينفع نفسو
Sense of SL proverb	Importance of self-reliance

TL text	Sense of TL proverb	Strategy used	Compatibility of sense
1-You are responsible for everything you do	Personal accountability	Using a proverb of different meaning and form	—
2-If you want a thing done well, do it your self	Self-reliance	Using a proverb of similar meaning but dissimilar form	+
3-Only your hand will scratch your back	Self-reliance	Using a proverb of similar meaning but dissimilar form	+
4-The harder you work the luckier you get	Hard working is essential for success	Using a proverb of different meaning and form	—

5-Treat people toughly before they do	Don't be soft and lenient with others	Using a proverb of different meaning and form	—
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Discussion

This proverb means that self-reliance is very important and more useful than depending on others to fulfill certain tasks or duties since other people will only be busy doing their own tasks and business. Translators 1, 4 and 5 renderings are inconsistent with the original text meaning while translators 2, 3 renderings are compatible with the SL text meaning since they have conveyed the intended meaning of the significance of self-reliance and avoiding dependence on others.

10- ليش افوت بالعتمي واسمي بالرحمن

SL text	ليش افوت بالعتمي واسمي بالرحمن
Sense of SL proverb	Avoid risking oneself

TL text	Sense of TL proverb	Strategy used	Compatibility of sense
1-Why I do fault and then call the lord	Avoid risking oneself	Using a proverb of similar meaning and form	+
2-No rendering			—
3-Why put myself in a bad situation	Avoid risking oneself	Translation by paraphrase	+

4-Get out while the getting is good	Take advantage of the opportune moment	Using a proverb of different meaning and form	—
5-Just stay a way of troubles	Avoid risking oneself	Translation by paraphrase	+

Discussion

This proverb means that it is necessary to avoid endangering or risking oneself and that it is better to follow a risk free life and always be on the safe course.

With relation to the translators' renderings, translator 4 rendering is inappropriate, in the sense that translator 4 rendering denotes the meaning of seizing on the available opportunities and that contradicts the SL intended meaning. Translator 2 has failed to give any rendering for the SL text.

Translators 1, 3 and 5 have conveyed the intended meaning.

9- Conclusions

There have been many translation problems and gaps (linguistic and cultural) that have been noticed in the student's renderings of the translated Mosul's proverbs. These are summarized in the following:

- 1- Some students' renderings were irrelevant to the intended SL meaning in both meaning and form.
- 2- Some students have failed to give any renderings of the SL text .
- 3- There have been cases of misunderstanding for the original meaning of some of the given proverbs and that resulted in unsuitable renderings of the SL texts.
- 4- students were not able to translate proverbs that are culturally bound; this was evident in proverb (7) **الناس بالناس والاقرع يمشط الراس** where 4 student renderings were not conveyed .

This is due to the lack of cultural background knowledge.

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