

Translating Verbal English Idioms in Light of Baker's Strategy English-Arabic Comparison

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ABSTRACT	ARTICLE DETAILS
Baker proposed a strategy for translating idiomatic and fixed expression among languages. The strategy involves various ways aimed to find equivalent expressions in the target languages. This paper aimed to make a comparison between English and Arabic idioms according to Baker's strategy. The paper examined some examples – some of them mentioned by Baker - by analyzing and discussing Arabic idioms translated from English counterparts by referring to Baker's strategy; findings indicate the possibility and availability of such idiomatic expressions in Arabic context. KEYWORDS: idioms – translating – expressions – Arabic	Published On: 30 December 2025 Available on: https://irijsh.com/

INTRODUCTION:

"Translation involves far more than replacement of lexical and grammatical items between languages and, as can be seen in the translation of idioms and metaphors, the process may involve discarding the basic linguistic elements of the SL text so as to achieve Popovič's goal of expressive identity between the SL and TL texts". Basnnet (1992:37)

Undoubtedly translation process involves convey meanings and cultural connotations from SL to TL; not only lexical components. Idiomatic use of language requires transferring the most aspects of meaning and even shades of meaning to achieve the same effect and pragmatic purpose.

Aim: this paper aims to prove availability of idiomatic expression in Arabic and that translating idioms is possible, but depends on translator wide readings in culture of a source language.

Background:

Baker (2001) argued that, although most idioms resist variation in form, but some are more flexible, she means the most of the idiomatic expressions are difficult to change their form order, add, or omit from the phrase without distorting the intended meaning, but some are more flexible.

In part of translation, Baker stated that, person's competence in actively using idioms of a foreign language; hardly ever matches that of a native speaker. She declares: the majority of translator working into a foreign language cannot hope to achieve the same sensitivity that of native speakers in using and manipulating idioms.

I think this is true; as long as idioms are linguistically restricted to specific language, culture, and social context, but translators need ways to do their jobs.

Baker mentioned an argument but she was not convinced; argument that translator should work only into that language of habitual use, or mother tone, at least in specific genres. Baker quoted the following from Code of Professional Ethics of Translators, Guild of Great Britain: "A translator shall work only into the language (in exceptional cases this may include a second language) of which he has native knowledge. 'Native knowledge' is defined as the ability to speak and write a language so fluently that the expression of thought is structurally, grammatically and idiomatically correct (quoted in Meuss, 1981:278; my emphasis)".

If we accept this argument; translating idioms will be restricted for native speakers – in exceptional cases – for the non-native translators, but Baker didn't give up and specified the major the pose difficulties in translating idioms in two areas:

- The ability to recognize and interpret an idiom correctly.
- Difficulties involved in rendering the different aspect of meaning that an idiom conveys into the target language.

For purpose of translation; I think the key word here is "familiarity". If the translator is familiar with most idiomatic expressions in the target language, then he can reach the parallel expressions in the target language with their aspects of meanings. Unfortunately, this is possible for some idiomatic expressions with approximate equivalent meanings in the target language.

Baker summarized the main difficulties as follows:

a. An idiom may have no equivalent in the target language. The way a language chooses to express, or not express, various meanings cannot be predicted, and only occasionally matches the way another language choose to express the same meaning. Idioms which contain culture-specific items are not necessarily untranslatable. It is not specific items that an expression contains, but rather the meaning it conveys and its association with culture specific context which can make it untranslatable or difficult to be translated.

Example (1)

English idiom: (to carry coals to Newcastle)

Translation into Arabic: (بيع الماء في حارة السقاين)

Discussion 1: the Arabic expression means (to sell water in the water seller's quarter); it is equivalent for the English expression or most closely parallel. Both expressions refer to approximately same meaning (supply of something to someone who has plenty of it). Both expressions are culture-specific and convey the same meaning and somewhat different contextually. I mentioned approximately because the Arabic expression has another contextual usage refers to (when you try to convince someone else with something unlikely to happen or false promise to a person having good knowledge of the same matter).

b. An idiom may have a similar counterpart in the target language, but its context of use may be different; the two expressions may have different connotations, or they may not be pragmatically transferable.

Example (2)

English idiom: (Between a rock and a hard place)

Translation into Arabic: (بين المطرقة والسندان)

Discussion 2: in this example, English expression has a counterpart in Arabic; both idioms are the same in form, convey the same and all aspects of meaning. Both refer to (being in difficult situation with two equally unloved or unfavorable choices) in addition, from pragmatic point of view they are the same contrary to what mentioned by Baker.

c. An idiom may be used in the source text in both its literal and idiomatic senses at the same time. Unless the target-language idiom corresponds to the source-language idiom both in form and meaning, the play on idiom cannot be successfully reproduced in the target text.

Example (3)

English idiom: (to poke his nose)

Translation into Arabic: (يدس أنفه)

Discussion 3

In this example, both idioms are similar in form; to poke is equivalent of "يدس" whereas, his nose is equivalent of "أنفه" which consists of the noun + possessive pronoun. Also, both idioms are similar in literal and idiomatic senses at the same time; both idioms mean (to interfere in others' affairs).

SUMMARY OF BAKER'S STRATEGY:

Baker developed her own strategy in translating idioms; the strategy stated many factors should be taken into account not only availability, the factors include; the significance of the specific lexical items in the idiom, and appropriateness of using idiomatic language in the given register in the target language, it can be summarized as follows:

a. Using idiom of similar meaning and form:

This strategy involves using an idiom in the target language which conveys the same meaning of the target language, in addition, consists of equivalent lexical items. This kind of match can occasionally be achieved.

Example (4)

English idiom: (empty vessels make the greatest sounds)

Translation into Arabic: (الأواني الفارغة تصنع ضجيجاً أعلى)

Comment: both idioms have the exact meaning in source and target language and convey all aspects of meaning and connotations. In addition, they are same in lexical items.

b. Using idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form

It is often possible to find an idiom in the target language which has meaning similar to that of source idiom, but consist of different lexical items.

Example (5)

English idiom: (one good turn deserves another)

Translation into Arabic: (ما جزاء الإحسان إلا الإحسان)

Comment: both idioms have the meaning and connotations; But different in legal items.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

Above examples and discussions; indicates that idioms can be translated by finding equivalent idioms in the target languages. But this primarily depends on the competent of the translator to find the paralleled idioms. The availability of the counterparts depends on the concept of familiarity; and to what extent the translator's come across with idiomatic expressions in both languages. This can be achieved by going deep and extensive reading in culture and media.

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