

The Dilemma of Translating Color Idiomatic Expressions

Hanan M. Al-Mashagbeh

MA in English Language and Literature (Major in Linguistics)

Lecturer

University of Jordan

Abstract

This study investigates the translatability of certain idiomatic expressions of color. A number of expressions are selected from people's daily discourse. Each idiomatic expression of color is elicited, interpreted, and explained. Further, a suggested translation is provided. We further commented on the positive and negative connotations of each item in an attempt to come up with the proper translation equivalence: formal, ideational, or functional. It is found that text-typology plays a great role in choosing the proper equivalent, especially that no generation can be reached regarding assigning specific equivalence for certain culture-laden expressions.

1. Introduction

It is known that translation with its broader definition seeks to convey the pragmatic meaning of the intended message as originally intended by speakers. Also, some other translations scholars define it in light of the equivalence employed in the translating process, whether in light of formal equivalence, dynamic equivalence and functional equivalence or ideational equivalence (See Farghal, 2003). However, some translations are hard to be translated literally all the time due to the text-typology that governs the translation strategy. It has been found that some culture laden expressions have priorities when being translated from a distant culture. Shehabat, 2000, stressed that there are always top priorities in translating culture-laden expressions, especially when translating these expressions from Saudi Arabian Arabic into Standard English, where the audience is totally ignorant about the source language culture (Sl). Some schools of translation theories have started to focus on the intended message rather than the procedure and /or the translation strategy, a thing that helps them come up with some advanced perspective about the transference of ideas and thoughts form the source language text into the target language one. These schools have pointed out that translation is not only an art, but also it is a science where a translator, whether professional or proper, is supposed to worry about the function of the message rather than its content or its structure. In other words, they started focusing on conveying the message of the speaker at the expense of both the structure and the content, thus meaning they sacrifice the content and the structure for the sake of capturing and conveying the original message.

The present researcher sheds light on a translation matter he faced during teaching a course in translation in one of the private universities in Jordan. This problem is the untranslatability of certain expressions from Arabic into English. In fact, there are numerous numbers of expressions that are extremely hard to be interpreted and/ or captured especially when one opts to translate them literally i.e., via formal equivalence. Throughout the course of 2008, the researcher came up with different sets of expressions that are hard to be translated unless a translator is well-equipped with much translation expertise and lots of translations theories, let alone professionalism and competence. These sets include matters related to similes, metaphors, metonymy, synonymy, matters of translating humor, translating idiomatic expressions of colors,...etc. Here, the present researcher will elaborate on the latter matter, translating idioms of color, due to their repetitiveness in every day discourse. The rationale behind choosing the present topic is that we, as English major students, are always subject to sudden unexpected questions about how we can translate certain expressions, most of the time they sound very complicated and challenging because of their unfamiliarity and complexity in light of their linguistic features and embedded meanings. In fact, idioms and /or idiomatic expressions are very essential segments of speech that can't be removed from people's daily discourse. They normally show wisdom and brevity in discourse, thus saving much time and eloquence. Also, they can transfer lots of powerful messages that may not be easily expressed during normal and regular discourse.

From, here translating such elements is very significant because these expressions are part of the Arab heritage and culture. It is important to look for some translation strategies that help, professional and proper, translators capture these expressions. However, some studies (Al Masri, 2000) and Shehabat (2000) have concluded that literal translation may not well succeed in translating culture laden expression. They found that there are always specific translation strategies that need to be employed to render these expressions. Examples of these equivalences are ideational equivalence and Functional ones. These could convey almost any culture oriented expressions and/or idiom due to its power in rendering the idea and the function of these idioms.

Below I illustrate an example,

In Arabic literature are always bombarded with expressions such as

"انقعها واشرب ماءها"

Ing3ha weshrab ma'2ha

Which literally translates into

"soak it and drink its broth".

This proverbial expression in general is used when someone expresses a response of carelessness and indifference. In Arabic discourse, it is used to indicate that someone is careless about certain matters and affairs. For example, if someone is threatening another with a certain document or paper, the other may not be pleased and may respond negatively by uttering this idiom as a sort of rejection. In this specific negative context, the speaker tries his or her best to ignore the addressee. So, literal translation will not work properly here, so we should think of certain translation strategies that could capture the idea and function properly, even by sacrificing both the content and the structure.

Two suggested translations for the proverb above could be:

I don't give damn shit!!!

Shove it!!!

I don't care!!

So, apparently, these translations easily render the idea incorporated in the original proverb. Further, any ideational translation is also a possibility. For example, one can translate this proverb as:

I don't care about your threat!!

In fact, most scholars agreed on the difficulty of translating idiomatic expressions due to their linguistic nature. Peter Newmark commented on this notion by describing this process of being "tiresome". Among others, viz, Baker (1922), and Nida(1969), Newmark supports the notion that the process of translating idiomatic expressions is truly problematic even to professional translators. These experts, as thus far illustrated that there are certain factors " like discourse register, style [...] level of formality have a considerable influence on the effect of idioms in question so that even when the idiom is necessary for meaning, providing an equivalent of the same degree of informality..." (Ibid 1).

For the purpose of the current study, the present researcher will gather a number of idiomatic expressions that are related to color. These expressions will be analyzed in light of their usage, then they will be explained and suggested translations will be provided. Ten idiomatic expressions will be consulted, analyzed and translated. Further, their shades of meaning will be also elaborated. In other words, we will explain whether the idiom used has a positive or negative connotation. An ideational or functional equivalence will be provided.

يومك اسود

Youmakaswad

Apparently, the idiom above is uttered negatively, indicating threat. It normally carries a warning message for the addressee or the recipient of the message. The color "black" originally stands for evil, sadness and hatred. For example, when a female mourns her husband or father, she wears black dress. Also, black stands for darkness, so when someone threatens another by telling him, *Youmakaswad*, the recipient may not feel relaxed. So, the translator here will try their best to render the negative meaning of the idiom by saying something like,

Look! You will have a black day!!

Here, it is noted that an ideational equivalence succeeds in rendering the message here. No confusion is bound to occur because Arabic language always assumes that the color, black, always carries a negative meaning. The next example that supports the previous argument is

ابن البطة السوداء وابن البطة البيضاء

Ibn albatta alsawda webn elbatta elbeida

In this idiom, which is translated literally as "the black duck and white duck", one can easily understand that the speaker is fully upset because he or she does not feel well due to certain disrespectful attitudes he or she faces. Here, they utter this proverb as a response of rejection and objection to a certain attitude in which they feel persecuted, oppressed and suppressed. Here, a suggested translation that could capture these two idioms is "black sheep" "white sheep" simply because these idioms are internationally recognized. Here, the present researcher argues against New Mark who argues that formal and/or literal translation doesn't always succeed in rendering idiomatic expressions of color.

The next example raises a contradictory question in between two different cultures: The Eastern and the western one. This idiom reads thus,

ايدہ خضرا او عودہ اخضر

Eidoh khadra or 3oodoh akhdar

It is a fact that the color "green" in the Arabic culture is full of positive connotations, such as good omens, luck and religiosity, whereas the western culture does have a complete negative connotations as the green always stands for jealousy and envy. The idiom "green hand" or "green fingers" does hold a positive meaning in both Arabic and English cultures. So, a translator may opt for a translation such as,

Some has got green fingers,

Thus meaning that he is lucky that whenever he grows any kind of plants, these plants will remarkably grow up, blossom and become fruity in an unusual way.

Red is a very powerful color despite the different meanings attached to it, viz, sacrifice, freedom, championship, love, emotions, and fertility. The next example supports this argument. It reads,

فرجيه العين الحمرا

Farjeeh al ein alhamra

Which translates into

Show him or her "red eye",

The contextual debate normally clarifies the semantic meaning of the proverb in question. In it, there are two people: a strict and a tough person and a simple and peaceful one. One is trying to dominate the other. So, he tries to silence them due to certain behaviors and manners she or he previously conducted that made the speaker get to this level of anger and nervousness. Here, it is necessary to remind that the translation of the idiom in Arabic is commonly used in the Arab world with the same meaning. Yet, the west doesn't resort to the same term to represent anger and silencing others. There, s/he sometimes gives faces when they attempt to silence their peers. Here, the translation of the item in question is considered formal in Arabic but functional in the west.

دمه او عظمه ازرق

Damoh aw admoh azraq

This idiom translates into his bone is blue or his blood is blue. In fact, in the Arabic culture, the idiom assumes that the addressee is mean and selfish, and the speaker curses him by saying that he is totally mean. So, the translation is considered formally successful in the Arabic culture as it does carry the message of meanness and selfishness, along with hatred. The Western culture however addresses the same discussion differently. No equivalent is found in the western culture. That's why translators need to ideationally translate the idiom by referring to something like,

He acted meanly with him (ideationally)

Or

He dealt with him very strictly (Ideationally)

The last example that supports our argument here is the idiom,

قلبه ابيض

Qalboh abyyad

This idiom sounds extremely positive and is equipped with lots of different connotations. Almost all its synonymous connotations have one commonality: enjoying a pure and kind heart. The Arab culture embraces this idiom and translates it formally as "white heart" which reads very comprehensible. However, it is not used formally in the west that refers to it as "heart hearted or pure hearted". In fact, both renditions are universally recognized and point to the same feature of simplicity and heart-heartedness. Here, functional equivalence succeeds in translating such idiom.

2. Conclusions

Throughout the previous study, we have reached some major conclusions regarding the translatability of idiomatic expressions of color. It is found that there is a top priority in translating culture laden expressions, especially those idioms of color. While formal equivalence succeeds in the rendition of common knowledge, functional and ideational ones succeed in rendering culture-specific ones. Further, each text-typology has its own function, so no equivalence can be taken for granted. Finally, most idioms in question can be translated in a straightforward manner along with their intended messages.

Works Cited

- Farghal, M. and AL Masri, M. (2000) Reader responses in Quranic Translation. *Perspectives*. 8(1) 27-46.
- Farghal, M. (2003). Translation with Reference to Arabic and English. Dar Al Hilal for Translation.
- Newmark, P. (1918) Approaches to Translation. Oxford: Pergamon. Book. (1991). , About Translation. Bistbol.
- Shehabat, A. (2000) Peter Theroux's Translation of Proverbs: A case study of Munif's Narrative *Mudun Al Milh : Tagaseem Al Layl wal Nahar*. Unpublished M.A Thesis, Yarmouk University.
- Shehabat, A and Zeidanin H (2012) Sense for Sense Translation and the Dilemma of Comprehensibility in Translating Jordanian-Laden Proverbs: a literary perspective. *Studies in Literature and language*. 2.(29)
- Hanan M. Al-Mashagbeh Holds an MA in English Language and Literature majoring in Linguistics. Currently, she is a part-time lecturer at The University of Jordan.