

## FILLING SITUATIONAL GAPS: IDIOMS' TRANSLATION DILEMMA

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### **Abstract**

Translation is a process that takes place based on the value of each text. This study examines the challenges encountered in translating idioms as fixed types of expressions, and as culture-based linguistic components. SL Idiom equivalents are often found to be semantically divergent from their TL counterparts. Idioms are rendered with some degree of unavoidable translation loss, most probably at the level of wording, as well as phrasing. An appropriate idiom translation technique ought to handle such semantic, as well as situational subtleties with utmost care so as to avoid making the existing semantic gap in the ST-TT word relations even larger. Through identifying the type of equivalence that applies to the situation and/or social context in which the idiom is used, a TL idiom translation is supposed to be contextually-convergent to the SL message. The translation technique that gives more weight to situation and effect is to be adopted; therefore, a semantic-divergent translation of idioms is assumed to be more natural and serves to provide a dynamic equivalent for the SL idiom.

**Keywords:** Text/ Context / Equivalence/ Meaning / Culture / Language

### **Introduction:**

Nida (1964), cf (Khan, T. Raza, 2020:1) asserts that translation is the way of finding natural issues in the TL close to the SL, in terms of message and style. In the same respect, Nida, (2006: 11) states that, "Skilled translators must have a special capacity for sensing the closest natural equivalent of a text, whether oral or written", additionally postulating that, "translating is essentially a skill and depends largely on a series of disciplines, for example, linguistics, cultural anthropology, philology, psychology, and theories of communication."

Translation is mainly concerned with the text type, since identifying a SL translation technique is highly dictated by the value of that particular text that requires translation. According to Halliday (Halliday, 1976), cf(Wang, Fang, 2014:778), the word TEXT is used in linguistics to refer to any passage, spoken or written, of whatever length, that does form a unified whole.."

Text type is more essential than other nuances, since in translation, the correct categorization of the SL text facilitates relating it to its TL equivalence. In this way, translators are expected to possess more than simply the knowledge of two languages as systems of rules, particularly when dealing with sophisticated type of texts as "idioms". Idioms used in a particular language community is presented as a sociolinguistic uniform that is sprinkled with the items taken directly from that community. When the "sun" is used in Arabic context to symbolize absolute clarity, "crystal" is used, instead, in severely cold climates where the sun is barely visible and it rarely unfolds.

Since idioms are culturally encoded, attempting to translate them necessitates thinking twice about the appropriate technique to adopt. Khan, T. Raza (2020:2) emphasizes that, in the relationship between translation and culture, the strategies offered should be understood as an attempt to make the translation easy to understand by the TR [Target Reader] without blurring the message contained in the text written in the SL. According to Toury (1995, cf(Macau, Cristina M., 2003: 33), translation is communication between messages integrated in a given linguistico-cultural system, that means they are regulated by norms and through them a society controls the importation and exportation of its culture.

### **Meaning of a Text:**

Meaning is an abstract phenomenon that is difficult to capture, particularly in relation to texts the value of which varies between literal sense, to metaphorical, to situational, to pragmatic relation to context. It remains specially associated with a given context based on which it can only be deciphered out. Widdowson (1983), cf(Macau, Cristina M., 2003: 33) states that meaning is not in the text, texts just offer mere indications on the significance and intentions of the author, and the reader has to reconstruct them contrasting them with his/her world knowledge.

Baker, Mona (1992: 222), cf(Macau, Cristina M. (2003: 33) asserts that, “Whether one holds the view that meaning exists in text or in situations involving text in addition to other variables such as participants and settings, one cannot deny that a reader’s cultural and intellectual background determine how much sense he/she gets out of a text. Macau, Cristina M. (2003: 35-36) observes that, translators not only need to know their source language well; they must also have a thorough understanding of the field of knowledge covered by the source text, and of any social, cultural or emotional connotations that need to be specified in the target language if the intended effect is to be conveyed.

Nida, Eugene (2006:12) states that definitions of meaning are not easy to formulate, especially if one tries to combine a number of meanings into a single set of related usages. Nida (1945:207) cf(Aissi, Layachi, 1987:45) further asserts that "the meaning of any linguistic item must be considered in terms of the situation in which they occur". In the same vein, Aissi, Layachi (1987:46) observes that, “The situational model (vs linguistic and Hermeneutic models) stems from the idea that there is a relationship between situations and specific utterances”, reaffirming that, “any given utterance is governed and conditioned by a given situation.”

### **Text & Context:**

Construing a text highly relates to the context in which it has been produced. A text can never be sloughed off its context. Isolated words, as well, can never be given an independent meaning in translation whenever they are presented out of their context. The word “STOP” as a road sign, can be given a meaning on its own as it gains its context from the place where it has been fixed. The place where the sign has been projected is the context through which the word STOP can be understood as a legal warning that has its effect and authority, indeed. Melby, Alan K. & Foster,

Christopher (2010:2) asserts that, “Even though context is difficult to define, it has been treated in Translation Studies because it is impossible to ignore.”

In translation, two different types of texts are to be considered: the Source Text which is the one that has earlier been produced/created by its original writer/drafter/author; and the second which is to be rewritten/recreated/reproduced as an equivalent TT by the translator. In the same respect, Melby, Alan K. & Foster, Christopher (2010:4) asserts that, “The category of *text* can then be subdivided into the text at hand (the *source text*) and *other text*. Other text, clearly indicates the TT reproduced by the translator which is assumed to bear the same value as that of its TL counterpart.

### Idioms

Idioms remain as a Black Box that bears the society's sentiment, social reflections, moral values and items surrounding the members of that language community. When in an idiom a particular item is used for clarifying a situation, then that particular item referred to in the idiom represents a cultural, as well as social value for that community. Idioms are composed of the things around us. They are rich of flora and fauna that surround the idiom creator. Tens and hundreds of items that constitute idioms are directly taken from nature and things around us: plants and animals, insects, stones, metals, ...etc. (A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush”. The Arabic translation of this particular idiom, weighs on a larger number of the birds in the bush (ten). In this way, idioms can be defined as a cultural and social reserve of norms, values, sense of humor, and sentiments, ...etc.

In defining “idiom”, Cacciari, C. and Tabossi, P (1988: 668) states that, “Typically, an idiom is characterized as a string of words whose semantic interpretation cannot be derived compositionally from the interpretation of its parts. “Shoot the breeze,” for instance, cannot be understood by putting together shoot, the, and breeze in the same way in which “eat the soup” can be understood.

Dixson, Robert J. (ND:1), indicate the fact that,” the use of idioms is so widespread that an understanding of these expressions is essential to successful communication, whether in listening, speaking, reading, or writing.” He additionally observes that, “The student may learn grammar and, with time, acquire adequate vocabulary, but without a working knowledge of such idioms as above all, to get along, on the whole, to look up, etc., even the best student's speech will remain awkward and ordinary.” In this way, the fact that translating idioms is the real challenge for translators, since it imposes social, linguistic, as well as cultural constraints on the TL. Translating idioms necessitates decoding the cultural components of the SL idioms, in order to encode them in the TL sociocultural system.

Cacciari, C. and Tabossi, P (1988: 670) asserts that, “While many idioms can also be interpreted as literal sentences, this is not an essential characteristic. None of the following idioms, for instance, can be interpreted literally: “by and large,” “look after,” “lay down the law, ” “shoot the breeze,” “build castles in the air.” On the other hand, McCarthy (2002:10) clarifies that, “idioms are enormously various in length, structure and function, adding that, *Keep tabs on* behaves rather

like a verb, as do *take a shine to* 'become attracted to', *raise Cain* 'create a disturbance', *have a chip on one's shoulder* 'be resentful', and *kick the bucket* 'die'." McCarthy further states that, "Many idioms behave more like nouns, e.g. "The interrogation took a long time because the suspect kept introducing irrelevant arguments. / The interrogation took a long time because the suspect kept introducing red herrings." Again, a learner of English might be puzzled by a question like, "Did the suspect keep pulling fish from his pocket?" McCarthy (2002:10) expresses, further observing that, a native speaker, however, will know that 'red herring' is an idiom meaning 'irrelevant argument'; other noun-like idioms are: 'white elephant' for an unwanted object, 'dark horse', a competitor whose strength is unknown' and 'Aunt Sally', target of mockery.

### **Idioms as a Cultural Robust**

Nida, Eugene (2006:11-12) states that, "A language is a series of verbal habits that represent aspects of a culture. No one speaker possesses a complete inventory of the signs and the structures of a living language, but the society of speakers collectively possesses a language and can accordingly change the forms. But persons who wish to use the language of a different language community must learn how to use the words in a culturally acceptable manner."

Idioms, indeed, is a vehicle that convey not only words and expressions, but a full-fledged set of cultural components, communal sentiments, as well as linguistic elasticity to embrace moral values of that community. Translating an idiomatic expression in cases of non-equivalence, the TL is assumed to be elastic enough to comprise the vividness of the expression. In the same respect, Nida (2006:13) denotes the fact that, "creative verbal communication needs elastic rules. Creative writers constantly violate rigid traditions in order to attract attention and to increase the impact of what they want to communicate." (Nida, 1964), cf(Wang, Fang, 2014:778), further argues that in contrast with formal equivalence which focuses on the message itself, a translation of dynamic equivalence is not so concerned with matching the receptor language message with the source-language message, but with the dynamic relationship, that is, the relationship between receptor and message should be substantially the same as that which existed between the original receptors and the message."

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