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# Proverbs Translation Techniques from English into Arabic among Jordanian University Students

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#### **Abstract**

Proverbs are essential component of everyday language, and they offer a fascinating insight into cultures. They are short sayings of public wisdom with cultural origin and figurative meanings, known by native speakers and used in specific situations. The reason behind the importance of translating proverbs precisely is that they are an effective and powerful instrument for the transmission of culture, social morality, manners, traditional wisdoms, historical incidents, and thoughts of people from one generation to another. The main difficulty in translating proverbs lies in their metaphorical nature, as they are culture-bound expressions and carry an implicit meaning that goes beyond the literal meaning. This study aims to investigate the translation techniques used by the students of translation at Jordanians universities in translating English proverbs into Arabic. The study is qualitative by nature, but a quantitative analysis was carried out to calculate the frequencies of the employed techniques. In this case study, forty students were engaged as participants using a purposive sampling method. They were given a translation test to recognize the employed techniques in translating 10 proverbs. The analysis revealed that the used techniques in order were using a proverb of similar meaning but different form, using a proverb of similar meaning and form, and translation by paraphrase came in the last position. The study is significant in raising the students' awareness of the best techniques in translating proverbs for future translation works. The study has implications on translators to give emphasis on the language and cultural perspectives in translating culture-bound expressions to achieve successful communication between cultures.

**Keywords:** Culture-bound; equivalent; figurative; proverb; technique.

## Introduction

Translating proverbs is both linguistic and cultural act. it can be a real challenge for translators, who are expected to have an excellent command of the language they work with. proverbs are loaded with culture-specific expressions and contain many cultural elements that reflect experiences, values, wisdoms, and historical incidents. A detailed definition of a proverb is provided by Mieder (1995) who sees proverb as a reflection of culture and he defines it as a short, commonly known sentence of the folk which contains morals, wisdom, truth, and traditions in a metaphorical, fixed and memoizable form, and which is handed down from generation to generation. Norrick (1985) shared a similar view as he states that a proverb is a self-contained, pithy, traditional expression with a moral content, and a poetic form. However, Nida (1985) believes that proverbs are special metaphoric expressions, and the translator should know the proverbial concepts in both the SL and TL regarding their similarities and differences.

Proverbs often have corresponding equivalents in the TL, but even if a linguistic counterpart exists, still cultural differences must be considered since translation involves two different languages as well as two different cultures (Sathisha, 2020). In this regard, Nida (1964) argues that cultural expressions are fundamentally symbols for features of a particular culture and the main role of the translator is to transfer the message and cultural aspects as well to produce an equivalent to the receivers. Bassnett (1980) underlines the importance of this double by stating that language is the heart inside the body of culture. Thus, translators have to master both language and culture (Emmanuel, 2017; Makamu, 2017), especially the differences between them in order to overcome the barrier of language and culture in communication. proverbs are associated with elements deeply rooted in the SL; they are very specific and unique elements and belong to one culture created them. Therefore, translating them follows the functional approach where message should be shaped and embedded by its cultural context in which it was (Nida, 1964).

English and Arabic are two distant languages that are spoken by two different worlds in terms of origin, culture, religion, history, customs, and beliefs. These differences are apparent through the nature of their cultural expressions which makes each language peculiar and distinctive. As Glucksberg (2001) states that familiar expressions in one language society would be completely opaque to people from another society. So, understanding the cultural similarities and differences is essential for fruitful and successful translation.

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To great extent, cultural expressions are mostly the most difficult in finding the best corresponding equivalence as native speakers of a particular language have different ways of conceptualizing experiences and incidents. So, translating them is a real challenge due to cultural peculiarities and semantic properties. Delisle (1988) claims that what distinguishes translation is that it occurs between two different cultures, two worlds of thoughts and perceptions. This consideration goes hand in hand with Vermeer (2000) who maintains that language is a part of culture and thus they are inseparable. Understanding the lexicon of English language requires more than realizing the denotative meaning of words. It demands its speakers to have connotative word knowledge and understanding of figurative language, which used to go beyond the actual meaning of words to gain new insights into subjects or objects (Martirosyan, 2013). This process essentially requires skill, creativity, willingness, and determination to find the best equivalent (Kovács, 2016).

Each language has its own cultural legacy from idiomatic expressions to express and reflect its identity, heritage, and traditions which distinguishes one culture from another. Indeed, English idiomatic expressions are mirror of Western culture, embedding cultural information, and reflecting national characteristics and environments (Sun & Li, 2018). Therefore, each expression has its own cultural background and is often used beyond its literal meaning, so the pragmatic meaning of such expressions should be considered and not the literal one.

# Literature Review

Many theorists and linguists in the translation field have explored the close relationship between language, culture, equivalence, and translation. For instance, Vinay and Darbelnet (1995) view equivalence-oriented translation as a process which "replicates the same situation as in the original, whilst using completely different wording." According to them, equivalence is the ideal technique when translator has to deal with proverbs and idioms. The most complexities between languages appear in the translation of culture-specific items. To overcome the difficulties, translation researchers have proposed different techniques.

Duff (in Gorjian, 2006) quoted that "idiomatic expressions are notoriously untranslatable. These include similes, metaphors, proverbs and sayings (as good as jargon, slang, and colloquialisms)." Duff also proposed that if these expressions have no equivalents in the TL, the translator may approach to TL equivalent as 1) Literal translation, 2) Original word in inverted commas. 3) Close equivalents. 4) Non-idiomatic translation. In the same vein, Mollanazar (2001) proposed two techniques in translating proverbs: a) Some similar proverbs can be existed in the both languages with more or less similar form, vocabulary and meaning. b) Many proverbs may be found in the both languages which have the same meanings and can be used in the same contexts, but they have different form and vocabulary.

Baker (2018) has proposed four techniques for translating idioms and fixed expressions including proverbs which are:

- 1. Using an idiom of similar meaning and form of the SL expression.
- 2. Using an idiom of similar meaning but different form of the SL expression.
- 3. Translation by paraphrase, if there is no match exists in the TL.
- 4. Compensation, means using an idiom elsewhere in the TL text to make up for any loss of meaning.
- 5. Omission, if there is no close match in the TL or if paraphrasing is difficult.

Almilad (2023) explored some difficulties and techniques that Saudi translation students use when translating English proverbs into Arabic. To achieve the purpose of the study, The researcher conducted a translation test that consisted of ten English proverbs. The data analysis showed a low level of students' proficiency in translation where most of them opted for literal translation and paraphrasing, which negatively affected to convey the intended meaning and the quality of translation.

Jabak (2022) provided a proposed taxonomy of techniques used in translating English proverbs into Arabic. The proposed taxonomy classified the techniques into five, depending on the form and meaning of English proverbs and the availability of corresponding proverbs in Arabic. The techniques are; an exact corresponding between English and Arabic proverbs, a corresponding except for key culture-specific and

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environment-specific expressions, a fully mismatch in form with intact meaning, corresponding lines of Arabic poetry to some proverbs in English, and literal translation with or without an explanation.

Similarly, in a relevant study, Assaqaf (2019) investigated the techniques used for translating English proverbs into Arabic. The study findings revealed that a variety of techniques can be employed in translating proverbs, namely; using an Arabic formal ready-made equivalent, using an Arabic semi-formal ready-made equivalent, using an Arabic idiomatic ready-made equivalent, reproducing the English proverb into Arabic statement that embedded the same wisdom or advice, and using the literal translation. the researcher concluded that translators can prioritize the techniques according to the workability they offer in expressing the SL message in the TL.

Within the same effort, Alfaleh (2020) conducted a quality assessment to the translation of proverbs from English into Arabic selecting a published dictionary. The researcher analyzed data using Na Pham's error analysis model as a framework to detect the most common errors occur in their translation. The findings revealed that there are types of errors committed more than others. Also, the study found that very similar types of errors detected when translating proverbs using paraphrase and partial equivalence. Comprehension errors, providing imprecise meaning, and distorting the meaning are the most common errors when translating proverbs using paraphrase. Distorting the meaning and comprehension errors are the most common detected errors when translating proverbs using paraphrase. However, incorrect lexical choice is the most frequent detected error when using literal translation.

Quite related to the present study, Ababneh & Al-Ajlouny (2016) conducted a study aims at investigating how competent Jordanian students of English are in translating English proverbs into Arabic. Findings of the study revealed that translating a source language proverb into a target language proverb was the main technique used among subjects. The researchers concluded that the subjects' success and the ability in translating a proverb into a proverb is a sign that learners of English realize the best technique in translating proverbs. Likewise, Dweik & Thalji (2016) explored techniques used by Jordanian translators when translating proverbs from English into Arabic. The study revealed that the translation techniques used while translating proverbs from English into Arabic were using a cultural equivalent, literal translation, paraphrasing, and glossing.

Proverbs are culture- bound expressions contain elements which are derived from a particular culture. Translating them like any other type of fixed expressions, is linguistically and culturally sensitive. Accordingly, the translator first has to recognize the meaning, and then find the corresponding image that would reproduce the similar beauty and used in the similar context.

#### Method

This study is devoted to explore the translation techniques used by Jordanian university students of translation in translating proverbs from English into Arabic. Adopting a descriptive, qualitative research design is essential in this study because data presentation, interpretation, and analysis take a descriptive method. Forty translation students (n = 40) were recruited in this study as participants using a purposive sampling method. They were given a translation test to recognize the used techniques in translating ten proverbs based on Baker's (2018) classification for translating idiomatic expressions including proverbs as a type of them. Some statistics will be done to calculate the frequencies of each technique by using Microsoft Excel Spreadsheet, but the emphasis is more on the quality and the description of the information not on the quantity. In qualitative studies, small sample is enough because the objective is not statistical but data saturation. So, the sample size of the translation test is enough to represent the population since adding more participants does not result in additional information or perspectives.

## Results and Discussion

The researcher selected a purposive sample of 40 Jordanian translation students. They were given a translation test to recognize the employed techniques in translating ten proverbs. Proverbs fall under the umbrella of phraseological units, so the techniques used in translating idiomatic expressions are applicable to them. The researcher adopted Baker's (2018) classification of idiomatic expressions translation techniques as they are considered to be one of the best and the most recent. The sample consisted of 23 females and 17 males. The data were entered into Microsoft Office Excel software to calculate the

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percentages of the responses to each item. Table 1 below displays the frequencies and percentages of the used techniques.

No.	A proverb of similar meaning and form		A proverb of similar meaning but different form		Translation by paraphrase	
	Frequencies	%	Frequencies	%	Frequencies	%
1	0	0.00%	24	60.00%	16	40.00%
2	0	0.00%	29	72.50%	11	27.50%
3	0	0.00%	32	80.00%	8	20.00%
4	33	82.50%	0	0.00%	7	17.50%
5	0	0.00%	31	77.50%	9	22.50%
6	0	0.00%	26	65.00%	14	35.00%
7	33	82.50%	0	0.00%	7	17.50%
8	40	100.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
9	0	0.00%	23	57.50%	17	42.50%
10	0	0.00%	27	67.50%	13	32.50%

Table 1. The Frequencies and Percentages of the Applied Techniques in Translating proverbs.

For better analysis, each proverb is discussed separately to identify the used technique and the appropriate one. The participants were expected to come up with different translations of the given proverbs because of using different translation techniques. Besides, the researcher explains the meaning of each proverb in accordance with Cambridge Dictionary and Oxford Dictionary of English Idioms - Oxford Reference to verify accuracy. Accordingly, three techniques emerged from the students' translations which have been presented and discussed below.

Proverb 1: A fox is not taken twice in the same snare (one who learns from one's mistakes does not repeat them).

Experiences and Incidents in different cultures might have been conceptualized in the same way. For this proverb, an Arabic cultural equivalence already exists in the TL that has the exact meaning but different form. Majorly of the students with 60.00% used a proverb of similar meaning but different form, For example, لا يلدغ المؤمن من الجحر مرتين. Both proverbs in English and Arabic have the equal meaning, and can be used in the same context; the same function. It is possible to find a proverb in the TL which has a similar meaning to that of the SL, but which includes different lexical items. Whereas, some students used paraphrasing with 40%, such as لا يقع الخطأ مرتين.

Proverb 2: Every cloud has a silver lining (to emphasize that every difficult or unpleasant situation has some advantage).

The above Table illustrates that using a proverb of similar meaning but different form is greatly used which has accounted for 72.50%. The meaning of the TL proverb is the same as the SL original proverb but the lexical items are different. The students managed successfully and found the appropriate match in the TL, such as إنّ مع العسر يسرا; a verse in the Holy Quran, means in English every trouble will be solved and every negative incidence has a positive aspect to it. The students reproduced the appropriate cultural proverb with the same meaning but in a different form. Whereas, paraphrasing with 27.50% as كل مشكلة ولها حل means every problem has a solution.

Proverb 3: Jack of all trades and master of none (a person who can do many different types of work but who is not necessarily very competent at any of them).

The lexical items of a proverb in the SL may differ from its correspondent in the TL, though the semantic content can be identical across both languages. Once again, the students used an appropriate cultural equivalent which is a strong linguistic expression that exists in the TL by using a proverb of similar meaning but different form with a percentage of 80.00%, and it is the appropriate technique in this case. For example, to mean 'a person who can do many things but is not an expert in any of them.' Hence, the message is correctly conveyed. Some of them used translation by paraphrase with 20.00%, such as متعدد الأعمال والمواهب to refer to a person who has many skills and jobs to do. Others paraphrased it as لم which means not specialized in anything.

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**Proverb 4:** The ends justify the means (a situation in which the final aim is so important that any way of achieving it is acceptable).

From Table 1, it is noticed that almost all of the students with a percentage of 82.50% used a strong linguistic proverb, which already exists in the TL culture in terms of form and meaning. For example, الغاية that means 'a good result excuses any wrongs committed to achieve it', the TL proverb meets the same denotative and connotative meaning as the SL and consists of equivalent lexical items. So, both English and Arabic proverbs are identical in sense, image, and form. Using a proverb of similar meaning and form is the ideal technique and results in accurate translation. Some students opted for paraphrasing, such as نحقيق الهدف بأي ثمن with a percentage of 17.50%.

**Proverb 5:** A stitch in time saves nine (if you sort out a problem immediately it may save extra work later).

It is obvious that the students used their linguistic and cultural knowledge of the SL and TL in translating this proverb. They found a proverb of similar meaning but different form with a percentage of 77.50%, which is an equivalent proverb. For instance, داوي جرحك ليتسع, said to mean that it is better to deal with a specific problem instantly because you risk it getting much worse later on if you wait. The TL corresponding proverb carries the exact meaning as the SL proverb and used in the same situations but the words of which they are composed differ. Also, the students provided another proverb of similar meaning and function which is acceptable since it conveys the intended message. For example, عند من قنطار علاج said to mean that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, which is also a proverb in both English and Arabic. Translation by paraphrase was used with 22.50%, for example يجب أخذ التدابير في وقنها

**Proverb 6:** To add insult to injury (act in a way that makes a bad situation worse).

Correspondence in experiences and life lessons in different cultures might have been conceptualized in the same way. For this proverb, Table 1 shows that 65.00% of the students used a proverb of similar meaning but different form. For example, يضع على الجرح ملح said to mean that 'to do something that makes a bad situation worse for someone,' and means literally 'it would be like putting salt on an open wound which is very painful.' Both SL and TL proverbs have the same meaning and used in the same situation, but the words of which they are composed differ. It is worth mentioning that there is another cultural equivalent exists in Arabic which is ين بد الطين بله and also means to make a situation worse. While some students with 35.00% opted for paraphrasing, such as ينقد الأمور said to mean that 'to do something that makes a bad situation worse wound which is were painful.'

**Proverb 7:** All that glitters is not gold (the attractive external appearance of something is not a reliable indication of its true nature).

A similar proverb in the TL culture matches the SL proverb in terms of meaning as well as lexical items. Most of the students translated a proverb into a proverb with a percentage of 82.50%, which is the ideal technique. For example, اليس كل ما يلمع ذهبا that said to mean 'just because something looks precious, it doesn't mean that it is.' The Arabic proverb has the exact meaning as the original SL proverb; they are both identical in sense, image, and form. In this situation, the students preserved the meaning as well as the original image of the proverb with the same effect. Translation by paraphrase was used by 17.50%, such as I visually I visually

**Proverb 8:** It's easy come, easy go (indicate that a relationship or possession acquired without effort may be abandoned or lost without regret).

To translate a proverb into a proverb is the best a translator can do. In this case, both English and Arabic use the same strong proverb as part of social culture of both societies. All of the students with 100.00% found a proverb with a similar meaning and form which is the ideal technique, such as ما يأتي بسهولة يذهب In this situation, both proverbs are identical in sense, image, and form, and hence, the idiomatic flavor is preserved.

Proverb 9: Still waters run deep! (a person who says little, but who might in fact know a lot).

The students used their linguistic and cultural knowledge of the SL and TL in translating this proverb with a percentage of 57.50% by using the suitable cultural equivalent. The students used an equivalent Arabic proverb that carries the same exact meaning as the SL proverb, but the lexical items are different. For

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example, ياما تحت السواهي دواهي said to mean that 'someone who is calm and peaceful may have very strong emotions or a lot of knowledge.' The TL equivalent proverb equally conveys the strong message intended by the original SL proverb and used in the same context, but the words of which they are composed differ. Paraphrasing technique was used by 42.50%, such as لا تخلف إلا من الهادئ is said to mean that quite people are those who we must afraid from.

**Prover10:** Enough is as good as a feast (moderation is more satisfying than excess).

The most dominant technique was using a proverb of similar meaning but dissimilar form. Both English and Arabic cultures share the same meaning for this proverb, but in different lexical items that makes such proverb easy to be understood by the students. This proverb is translated correctly with a percentage of 67.50%, such as القناعة كنز لا يفنى. The TL equivalent proverb equally conveys the strong message intended by the original SL proverb and used in the same situation, but the words of which they are composed differ. Translation by paraphrase was used by 32.50%, such as كن قنوعاً which means be content.

Table 2 demonstrates the percentages of the used techniques in the translation test. Based on the results, it was found that the most frequent used technique was using a proverb of similar meaning but different form with 48.00%. This could be attributed to similarities between cultures where correspondence in experiences in different social realities seems to have generated somehow similar proverbs. Then, using a proverb of similar meaning and form technique came in the second position with 26.50%. Translation by paraphrase came in the last position with 25.50%.

TechniqueFrequencyPercentageA proverb of similar meaning but different form19248.00%A proverb of similar meaning and form10626.50%Translation by paraphrase10225.50%

Table 2. The Used Techniques in Translating Proverbs.

To translate culturally-bound expressions, translator may opt for different techniques depending on the type of culturally-bound expression itself. Each proverb carries a specific meaning in a specific context of a situation. Then, a proverb should be translated with paying attention to express the same cultural notion in the original proverb.

## Conclusion

The reason behind the importance of translating proverbs is that they are common and wise sayings based on people's daily life experiences, and they are a reflection of their sensitivity and social values. So far, English and Arabic are two distant languages. Thus, translators often encounter some challenges in translating proverbs from English into Arabic or vice versa due to the cultural differences between both language as well as the lack of equivalents for some proverbs. In fact, in real language use, it is not the case that words convey the meaning; they are words within a cultural context that create the intended meaning. The complexity of proverbs translation is raised by the metaphorical nature they carry, due to the diversity of connotations they convey; many of their connotations are cultural-bound and because they violate many linguistic rules.

The study investigates the techniques used in translating proverbs from English into Arabic. It is essential to know that proverbs fall under the umbrella of phraseological units, so the techniques used in translating idiomatic expressions are applicable to them. For that reason, the researcher adopted Baker's (2018) classification of idiomatic expressions translation techniques. The study concluded that the most frequently used technique was using a proverb of similar meaning but different form with 48.00% since there are many SL proverbs have functional cultural equivalents in meaning but not in form as correspondence in experiences in different cultures seems to have generated somehow similar proverbs. The second one was using a proverb of similar meaning and form with 26.50%. Among the SL proverbs, some have a similar or identical correspondence in the TL; such proverbs reflect universal shared bodily experiences between cultures which is the ideal technique, but hardly occurs. Translation by paraphrase came in the third position with 25.50% which occurs if there is no match can be found for the SL proverb in the TL.

The study is significant in raising students' awareness of the best techniques used in translating proverbs for future translation works. The study has implications on translators to give emphasis on the language and cultural perspectives in translating culture-bound expressions. Further research is needed to highlight and understand the similarities and dissimilarities between English and Arabic cultures.

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