Obstacles Faced by the Jordanian Novice Translators in Translating Arabic Proverbs

Prof. Bader Saeed Dweik
Department of English, Faculty of Arts and Sciences
Middle East University, Amman, **Jordan**
Mohammed Basam Thalji
Department of English, Faculty of Arts and Sciences,
Middle East University, Amman, **Jordan**

ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore the obstacles that Jordanian novice translators encountered when translating proverbs. To achieve this goal, a purposive sample of 20 Jordanian novice translators (males and females) was selected. A translation test, consisting of 10 Arabic proverbs based on Speake's (2008) categorization of proverbs, was used in addition to carrying out informal interviews with four university translation Professors. The study revealed that the obstacles which Jordanian novice translators faced when translating proverbs from source language (SL) i.e. Arabic into target language (TL) i.e. English were: inability to translate culturally-bound words/expressions properly; using literal translation and misuse of the appropriate lexical words; committing linguistic, stylistic, and grammatical mistakes; and unfamiliarity with translation strategies and techniques.

1. Introduction

Translation is an important process that has a key role in exchanging information, news, culture, literature and sciences among people all over the world. It is a process of changing the source text with all of its aspects semantically, syntactically, culturally, and pragmatically into a different language.

Proverbs are fixed expressions that are important in any language because they have meanings that can cover all aspects of life and, this in turn, makes them important elements in peoples' speech. They could carry themes related to religion, God, family, marriage, men and women, education, health, friendship, money, animals, neighborhood,

experiences, wisdom, poverty and wealth. Translators are usually careful when translating proverbs into their closest equivalence in the TL because there are many obstacles that face them while translating proverbs, for instance, the structure of proverbs is not like any simple sentence that everyone is familiar with. They have their own structure, pattern and style. Moreover, there are proverbs which contain some cultural aspects in the SL that can't be found in the target culture.

In translating proverbs, translators encounter some obstacles due to the big linguistic, stylistic and cultural gap between Arabic and English. One of the linguistic difficulties is achieving equivalence when rendering proverbs into the TL. This study aims to explore the obstacles that Jordanian novice translators encounter when translating proverbs and the reasons that trigger such obstacles as well.

1. 1 Significance of the Study

Studies that deal with translating proverbs are relatively scanty, especially in Jordan. Most of the studies focus on the difficulties that MA students encounter when translating proverbs from English into Arabic. This study focuses on translating proverbs form Arabic into English, taking into consideration holders of BA and MA degrees in English who lack practical or professional experience in translation. The findings of the study may help translators, students, readers, writers, researchers, translation critics, and other people interested in this field. It is expected to fill a gap in literature.

1.2 Objectives and Questions of the Study

This study aims to explore the obstacles that Jordanian novice translators encounter when translating proverbs and the reasons behind these obstacles from the view point of academic scholars. The study raises the following questions:

1- What are the obstacles that Jordanian novice translators face when they translate proverbs?
2- What are reasons behind such obstacles from the view point of academic scholars?

2. Review of Literature

Many scholars in different countries have investigated issues related to problems involved in translating proverbs i.e. Hambleton & Zeniski (2011), Classe (2000), Emery (1997), Ray (2008), Newmark (1988), Bekkai (2009), Dweik & Suleiman (2013) and AlSaidi (2014).

Hambleton & Zeniski (2011) mention that grammatical structure may cause problems to translation because every language has different way of word structure to express its ideas. This difference causes problems when creating parallel versions for cross-lingual use like the arrangement of clauses, verb tenses, plurals (unlike English, Arabic expresses dual and plural), masculine or feminine nouns, the pronoun 'you' which indicates a single person or multiple persons in English while other languages do not have this indication. Additionally, punctuation may cause problems to translators if it is used wrongly.

Classe (2000) assumes that differences between SL culture and TL culture may cause translation loss because there are some contextual aspects that have features related exclusively to SL culture and they are not found in the TL culture. These features are unusual lifestyle or habits of particular people that do not appear in the TL. This view is proposed by Emery (1997) who states that what makes a challenge to the translator when translating proverbs is their culturally-bound nature. He clarifies that the translator is a mediator between cultures and he should render the literal and figurative meaning of the proverbs as well as their communicative effect. Similarly, Ray (2008) believes that

linguistic and cultural factors make the process of translation difficult.

Newmark (1988) has classified foreign cultural expressions as ecological, material, and social cultures that contain expressions associated with social organizations, political, religious, artistic, gestures and habits. These cultural expressions can be found in proverbs, collocations, phrasal verbs and figures of speech including metaphors. Translating cultural texts is not an easy task and translators should be aware of the culture they translate from and the culture they translate to. Proverbs have cultural aspects that cause difficulties to translators.

Empirically, Bekkai (2009) investigated the problems of translating culturally Arabic/English/Arabic loaded idioms and proverbs. Twenty English and Arabic idioms and proverbs were given to 25 undergraduate students majoring in English at Mentouri University in Constantine who already completed two years of translation training theoretically and practically. Then, the items were analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. The study revealed that decoding the cultural message of idiom or proverb and encoding them were the two main problems. Consequently, 40% of the items were translated literally because of a failure in expressing the intended meaning. Thirty per cent of the translations were interpretations; about 22% of them were misinterpretations. Thirdly, about 50% of the items were left out without translation because of the inability to understand the English task items or the incapability to produce versions of Arabic ones.

Dweik & Suleiman (2013) investigated problems of translating English culturally–bound expressions which Jordanian graduate students faced. A convenience sample of 60 graduate students enrolled in three Jordanian universities during the second semester 2009/2010 was given a translation test that included 20 statements of culturally-bound expressions based on Newmark's categorization of cultural terms such as proverbs, idioms, collocations. Also, informal open-ended interviews with experts in the field of translation were carried out to elicit additional information regarding problems, causes and solutions. The study revealed various kinds of translation problems such as: unfamiliarity with cultural expressions, failure to achieve the equivalence in the second language, ambiguity of some cultural expressions, lack of knowledge of translation techniques and translation strategies.

AlSaidi (2014) investigated the problems of translating culturally-loaded English proverbs (CLEPs) into Arabic by domestication strategy produced by Venuti in his Translator's Invisibility (1995). Forty-two proverbs were chosen randomly and analyzed according to domestication strategy. Results revealed that the implied meaning of the CLEPs caused too much difficulty to translators because of their unique structural and stylistic features and they were more specifically culturally loaded. Consequently, the translator failed to render such proverbs into the target language accurately and functionally. Moreover, the lack of linguistic and cultural knowledge in both languages caused problems of understanding the intended meaning. Finally, The Arabic language is rich with culture-loaded proverbs that cover issues similar to those of English proverbs especially in Qur'an, Hadith, Nahjulbalagha; so the wide knowledge of a translator in the aforementioned sources may help him/her to find the cultural equivalences to CLEPs.

3. Methodology
3.1. Sampling Procedures

The Population of this study consists of BA and MA holders who have no practical experience in translation. From this population, a sample of 20 Jordanian novice translators (males and females) is chosen purposively to take a translation test of 10 Arabic proverbs. Another sample of four academic scholars is selected to participate in the interviews.

The demographic data and general background of the respondents include gender, age, nationality, work experience and languages. The sample includes eight males and twelve females whose age ranges between 23 and 30. All of them are Jordanians and have no experience in translation. Some of them are English teachers and speak both Arabic and English.

3.2. Instruments of the Study

This study uses a mixed design in gathering and scrutinizing the needed data. The study adopts the qualitative and quantitative approaches (a test and open-ended interviews) in presenting the findings of the research.

3.2.1. Translation test

A test is designed to investigate the obstacles that testees encounter when translating proverbs form Arabic into English. The test consists of 10 Arabic proverbs selected from Arabic resources of proverbs to be translated into English. The proverbs are chosen according to Speake's (2008) categories of proverbs (abstract statement, everyday-experience, traditional wisdom and folklore) and they cover many themes as it is proposed by Stanely (2009). The test is made to meet the needs of the study which are pretested before the test is administrated. Gaber's (2005) and Newmark's (1988) techniques for translating culturally-bound expressions are used as the basis for data analysis of the test items.

Three alternatives are used in scoring the test: (1) The answer is considered correct if the proverb is translated by using cultural equivalence, functional translation, glossing or borrowing; (2) if the proverb is translated by using the paraphrase technique with correct language, the translation is considered acceptable; and (3) it is considered wrong if the proverb is translated by using literal translation, by giving irrelevant meaning or by making linguistic and stylistic mistakes that distort the entire meaning of the proverb.

3.2.2. Interviews

The researchers hold interviews with four academic scholars who are asked about obstacles that are encountered when translating proverbs and the reasons that stand behind these obstacles. The four interviewees are university professors who have experience in teaching translation and linguistics in Jordanian universities.

4. Results

4.1. Results of the Test

Findings of the translators' performance are presented in Table (1) below. Each proverb is discussed separately to show the type of obstacles encountered.

Table: 1 Novice translators' performance in the test

No.	Proverb	Correct Answer		Acceptable Answer		Wrong Answer	
		F	%	F	%	F	%
1	يعمل من الحبة قبة.	15	75	0	0	5	25
2	رأس الحكمة مخافة الله.	11	55	6	30	3	15
3	اضرب الحديد وهو حامي.	18	90	0	0	2	10
4	العدل أساس الملك.	2	10	14	70	4	20
5	رجع بخفي حنين.	1	5	15	75	4	20
6	لا يكلف الله نفسا إلا وسعها.	4	20	1	5	15	75
7	كالمستجير من الرمضاء بالنار.	7	35	9	45	4	20
8	النظافة من الإيمان.	15	75	1	5	4	20
9	كل فتاة بأبيها معجبة.	3	15	12	60	5	25
10	جنت على نفسها براقش.	9	45	7	35	4	20
The Total Number of Proverbs for 20 Translators (200)		85	42.5	65	32.5	50	25

Proverb: 1 يعمل من الحبة قبة

In translating this proverb, Table (1) indicates that (75%) of the respondents provide correct answers by using English cultural equivalence such as "to make a mountain of a molehill". On the other hand, (25%) of them show wrong answers by using literal translation such as "to make a mountain of dome" and "he makes a dome out of a grain". Accord   ing   to Al-Mawrid Dictionary (2001), this proverb is translated as "to make a mountain of a molehill".

Proverb: 2 رأس الحكمة مخافة الله

Whereas (55%) indicate correct answers by using English cultural equivalence such as " the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom", (30%) provide acceptable answers by using the paraphrase technique like "God fearing is wisdom", "the wisdom is to fear God" ,"the fear of God is wisdom" and "fear of God is wisdom". Meanwhile, (15%) offer wrong answers by committing linguistic and stylistic mistakes that distort the entire meaning of the proverb like "the highest wesdom fear of god", "The wisest is the from God" and "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" .

According to Juilie Murad Dictionary of comparative proverbs English Arabic (1998, P.124), this proverb is translated into "the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom ".

Proverb: 3 اضرب الحديد و هو حامي

Ninety per cent show correct answers by using English cultural equivalence such as "strike while the iron is hot" while (10%) display wrong answers by making linguistic and stylistic mistakes that distort the entire meaning of the proverb such as "strike while the iron is protector" and "at the drop of a hat". According to Al-Mawrid Dictionary (2001), this proverb is translated as "strike while the iron is hot".

Proverb: 4 العدل أساس الملك

While (10%) supply correct answers by using English cultural equivalence such as "justice is the beginning of governance", (70%) give acceptable answers by using the paraphrase technique like "justice is the basic element for ruling", "justice is the base of governance", "justice is the basis of ruling", "being just is the basic of ruling". Meanwhile, (20%) indicate wrong answers by making linguistic and stylistic mistakes which distort the entire meaning of the proverb like "justice is the basis", justice is the base of power", "fairness is the authority's core" and "justice delayed is justice denied".

Proverb: 5 رجع بخفي حنين

Only (5%) answer correctly by combining the borrowing and glossing techniques i.e. extra information is added in a footnote to explain the meaning of the proverb as "he returned with Hunain's shoes" and the meaning of Hunain is explained in a footnote as follows:

[*The shoemaker Hunain was visited by an Arabic customer riding a horse to buy a particular pair of shoes. After they had spent a long time in the negotiation and agreed on its price, the customer didn't buy. Hunain got angry and followed him and knew the road that the customer follows to make trick to him. Then, Hunain put the first pair of the shoes in one place and the second pair in another place so that the customer could see them. The man passed the first shoe and remembered that this is the shoe which he wanted to buy form Hunain but he left it. Afterward, he approached the second one and took it but he left his horse to bring the first one. Meanwhile, Hunain stole the horse. Then, the customer's family said about him after knowing the story (he returned with Hunain shoes)].*

Likewise, (75%) respond correctly by using the paraphrase technique i.e "to return empty-handed", "he came back empty handed", "he came back with nothing" "returned as disappointed". Yet, (20%)

provide wrong answers by using literal translation and by committing linguistic and stylistic mistakes that distort the entire meaning of the proverb such as " he came back with no shoes" , " to turn with Hunain shoes", "retuned empty the passion", "ended up for nothing" and "he came back have nothing". According to Juilie Murad Dictionary of comparative proverbs English Arabic (1998, P.130) this proverb is translated as "*to dine with Duke Humphrey*".

Proverb: 6 لا يكلف الله نفسا إلا وسعها

While (20%) present correct answers by giving English cultural equivalence such as "a man can do no more than what he can", only (5%) indicate acceptable answers by using the paraphrase technique such as "Allah burdens not a person beyond his power". Meanwhile, (75%) provide wrong answers by using literal translation and by committing linguistic, lexical and stylistic mistakes that distort the entire meaning of the proverb like "God charges no soul save to it capacity", "Allah don't enforce anyone more than his ability" , "don't carry that pole at your neck, with its heavy load, all by yourself" , "Allah burden's not a person beyond his scoop", "Allah doesn't give a person other than he can", "Allah doesn't impose any soul anything but its ability", "allah does not charge any soul except within its ability" and "God charges no soul safe to its ability", "Allah give not any soul beyond it can take ". According to The Nobel Qur'an: English Translation of the Meaning and Commentary (1430 A.H P. 66), this verse is translated as "*Allah burdens not a person beyond its scope"*. Furthermore, the English proverb in Dictionary of proverbs (2006, P.364) "*a man can do no more than he can"* matches the meaning of this verse.

Proverb: 7 كالمستجير من الرمضاء بالنار

While (35%) answer correctly by using English cultural equivalence such as "out of frying pan into fire", (45%) supply acceptable

answers by using the paraphrase technique, like "as one who chooses the fire instead of its heat", "jumping from a frying pan into the fire", "to escape from the hot to fire" and "he jumped out of frying pan into fire". Meanwhile, (20%) give wrong answers by using literal translation and committing linguistic, lexical and stylistic mistakes and by giving irrelevant meaning like "as one escaping from the hot to fire", "from the pan into fire" and "beware of the man who received charity from you". According to Juilie Murad Dictionary of comparative proverbs English Arabic (1998, P.105) this proverb is translated as (Out of frying-pan into fire)

Proverb: 8 النظافة من الإيمان

Whereas (75%) answer correctly by using English cultural equivalence such as "Cleanliness is next godliness", only 5% provide acceptable answers like "cleanliness is related to godliness". Meanwhile, (20%) furnish wrong answers by making linguistic and stylistic mistakes like "Cleanliness is next goodness", "Cleanness is next godliness", "Cleanliness is next godliness" and "Cleanliness of faith". According to Al-Mawrid Dictionary (2001), this proverb is translated as "Cleanliness is next to godliness".

Proverb: 9 كل فتاة بأبيها معجبة

While (15%) respond correctly by using English cultural equivalence such as "every cook praises his own broth", (60%) offer acceptable answers by using the paraphrase technique such as "every girl loves her father", " each girl admires her father", "every girl admires her father", "every girl is fond of her father" and "every girl is fascinated by her father". Meanwhile, (25%) provided wrong answers by making linguistic and stylistic mistakes like "a girls first true love is her father", "a son's first hero, a daughter first love", "each girl by her father admires" and "each girl is admired by her father".

Proverb: 10 جنت على نفسها براقش

Forty-five per cent furnish correct answers by using English cultural equivalence, such as

"snitches end up in ditches", "ignorance is the most terrible acquaintance" and "Baraqish killed herself" and in a footnote, the translator adds more information i.e. *[a name of a dog whose owners were followed by the enemy but they were discovered by the trace of Baraqish and all of its owners as well as the dog* were killed].

Nonetheless, (35%) show acceptable answers by using the paraphrase technique such as "to dig one's grave" and "she digs her grave". Meanwhile, (20%) mistranslate the proverb by using literal translation and irrelevant meaning such as "Baraqish killed herself", "on herself Baraqish reap" and "ignorance is the death of living".

4.2. Results of the Interview Question

The first interviewee, specialized in translation and linguistics, reported that cultural barriers between the SL and TL are the main obstacle when translating proverbs. In addition, literal translation causes problems in translating proverbs because the single words that form the proverb do not help at all to give the general meaning of proverb". He added that "when the translator lacks cultural background of the SL in particular, he will be unable to translate proverbs correctly".

The second interviewee, specialized in applied linguistics, reported that students face many obstacles when translating proverbs and the most serious one is the literal translation due to the poor cultural knowledge. He added that a translator will resort to the paraphrasing technique but, unfortunately, it will be wrong paraphrasing. Furthermore, he mentioned that the reasons underlying these obstacles are the lack of practice in translating proverbs and the incomplete acquisition of language competence in English and Arabic. He also added that the syllabus of the universities is not good enough because it is full of theories and it lacks translation practice, and that schools do not provide needed cultural and linguistic bases for the students and this causes a problem for the translator especially when translating such cultural texts.

The third interviewee, specialized in translation, confirmed that culture bound expressions cause obstacles when translating proverbs because some words are related to specific cultures and do not exist in other languages like "براقش". She added that "translating a proverb as one unit is not an obstacle, what cause problems when translating proverbs are choosing wrong lexical words and the differences between cultures. Every language has culturally bound words and structures that are not found in other languages.

The fourth interviewee, specialized in literature, stated that what causes obstacles when translating proverbs may be: translators sometimes cannot understand the proverb because of the complexity of its style and structure and as it is from a different culture which has its own unique aspects. He also maintained that there are many reasons for these obstacles such as the unfamiliarity of the cultural and social expressions. Such unfamiliarity might be due to the lack of exposure to the target culture and the lack of cultural materials taught at universities as well. He mentioned that the little practice of translation causes some obstacles because theories should be applied and put into practice.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The study has revealed that the obstacles which Jordanian novice translators face when translating proverbs from Arabic into English are: inability to translate culturally-bound words/ expressions properly; giving wrong

TL equivalent, irrelevant meaning and wrong paraphrasing; using literal translation and misuse of the appropriate lexical words; committing linguistic, stylistic, and grammatical mistakes; and unfamiliarity with translation strategies and techniques.

The first obstacle is the inability to translate culturally bound words i.e. proper names such as (براقش) and (حنين) which makes the translation of the proverbs vague and inaccurate. This stems from the lack of equivalence and the differences between Arabic and English and the lack of knowledge in the strategies and the techniques used in translating proper nouns. Additionally, they could not explain the meaning of the proverb because the concepts which the SL lexical items refer to are not available in the TL. This result agrees with Baker (1992) who assumes that the SL text may have a word that is unknown in the target culture. The result is also in line with Emery (1997) who assumes that what makes a challenge to the translator when translating proverbs is their culturally-bound nature. Moreover, this result agrees with that of Dweik & Suleiman (2013) who mentioned that unfamiliarity with cultural expressions causes problems for translators.

The second obstacle is using literal translation which does not consider the contextual meaning because they either misunderstand the intended meaning or have no prior knowledge in such vocabularies. Some translators substitute the SL words with TL words without considering the semantic and linguistic aspects of the words used. Translators should consider the hidden meaning and think of an expressive meaning that must be used to offer a logical translation. For instance, some translators tend to give wrong meanings for the proverb "اضرب الحديد وهو حامي". The word (حامي) here indicates "hot" but some translators rendered it into (protector). This result corresponds

with Baker (1992) who maintains that differences in expressive meaning cause problems in translation. It also agrees with Bekkai (2009) who finds out that literal translation has a high score because of a failure in expressing the intended meaning. Similarly, it agrees with Alsaidi (2008) who finds that literal translation and lack of linguistic and cultural knowledge in both languages cause problems of fully understanding of the intended meaning.

The third obstacle is committing linguistic, stylistic, and grammatical mistakes when translating proverbs without considering the linguistic, stylistic and grammatical aspects of the SL and TL. Perhaps, some translators commit such mistakes because they lack practicing translation, they are in a hurry while translating, they do not edit their answers after finishing the translation or they do not have enough linguistic competence. This result agrees with Hambleton & Zeniski (2011) who report that grammatical structure may cause problems to translators. It also agrees with Akabri (2013) who finds out that translators must be aware of the SL and TL style when translating idioms.

The fourth obstacle is the unfamiliarity with translation strategies and techniques. The translators' use of some strategies is not deliberate but by chance. Some of them use literal translation and depend on the guessing technique but this is not helpful in translating proverbs that contain culturally bound words like"جنت على نفسها براقش" and "عاد بخفي حنين". Therefore, it is important for the translator to be familiar with translation strategies and techniques. This result agrees with that of Dweik & Suleiman (2013) who find that the lack of knowledge in translation techniques and translation strategies is one of the problems that students have encountered.

After investigating the obstacles that Jordanian novice translators face when

translating proverbs from Arabic into English, it is evident that they face many obstacles related to their inability to translate culturally bound words/expressions in context especially terms or expressions that do not have equivalents. Using literal translation indicates their inability to choose the proper strategy or technique which renders the meaning clearly and accurately. Also using the wrong lexical terms indicates low level of prior knowledge and lack of readings in different areas which allow the translator to build up his vocabularies and use them properly. Most of their grammatical and structural mistakes show their weaknesses in knowing both languages and cultures.

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Appendix: A [A Translation Test)

Dear translator,

The researchers are conducting a study dealing with "Obstacles in Translating Arabic/English Proverbs". Enclosed is a translation test designed only for the purpose of carrying out this research. You are kindly requested to translate the enclosed ten Arabic proverbs into English. You may use any external resources like dictionaries.

Your participation, time and efforts are highly appreciated.

The researchers

1- Demographic Background

Please answer the following questions.

1- What is your gender? (   )Male   (   ) Female

 3-   What is your age?

………………………………………

3-   What   is   your   nationality?

………………………………………

4- How many years of work experience do you have ?………………

5- How many years did you spend in an English country?................

2- The Test

A: Translate the following proverbs into English.

1- يعمل من الحبة قبة.

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_____

2- رأس الحكمة مخافة الله

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3- اضرب الحديد وهو حامي.

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4- العدل أساس الملك.

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5- رجع بخفي حنين.

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6- لا يكلف الله نفسا إلا وسعها.

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7- كالمستجير من الرمضاء بالنار.

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8- النظافة من الإيمان.

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9- كل فتاة بأبيها معجبة.

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10- جنت على نفسها براقش.

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Appendix: B [Interview Question]

Dear professor,

    The researchers are conducting a study dealing with "Obstacles in Translating Arabic/English Proverbs".

Based on your experience and knowledge of the fields of linguistics and translation, we would like to carry out an open-ended interview which raises one question .Your time, help, effort, and cooperation in commenting on the following are highly appreciated. :

Q) What are the obstacles that novice translators face when translating proverbs and the reasons that stand behind these obstacles?

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