

## Difficulties EFL Jordanian University Students Encounter in Translating English Idioms into Arabic

Dr. Amal Alrishan\*

PhD in Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Yarmouk University, Irbid, Jordan

E-mail: alzoubi14@yahoo.com

Oqlah Smadi

Professor of Applied Linguistics, Yarmouk University, Irbid, Jordan

E-mail: Oqlahsm@yu.edu.jo

### Abstract

This study aimed at investigating the difficulties that Jordanian EFL University students encounter in translating English idioms into Arabic. The participants of the study were all M.A translation students at Yarmouk University and the University of Jordan who were selected purposefully. The total number of the students who participated in the translation test which contains 16 idioms of different categories was 90. The quantitative findings of the study revealed that EFL Jordanian university students encountered difficulties in translating English idioms into Arabic.

**Keywords:** Difficulties, EFL translation students, Translating idioms

### 1. Introduction

Idioms constitute a problematic area for both foreign learners of English and translators. The foreign learners should possess a good knowledge of idioms in terms of their true meanings as well as their cultural associations. As a matter of fact, idioms are rather problematic and difficult to learn. This can be ascribed to a number of factors. Some factors are related to the nonliteral meanings of idioms or to the odd word grouping of some idioms, or rather to the rigid word order of some idioms. Other factors can also be detected such as insufficiency of teaching techniques followed in this area, inadequacy of the criteria of textual frequency, the foreign learning situation in which English is learned, and lack of cultural assimilation on the part of the students. The translator, on the other hand, has a two-fold responsibility laid on his shoulder. First, like foreign learners, a good mastery of idioms in terms of meanings and cultural backgrounds is required. Then, and most importantly, he is asked to give equivalent idioms in the target language to which he is translating taking into account the cultural differences that may arise between both languages.

In translating idiomatic expressions from English into another language, a translator usually meets some difficulties that are hard to overcome. Therefore, it is necessary to overlook some arising difficulties and then discuss some solutions in order to deal with these problems. There are two main difficulties the translator meets that Baker (1992, p.68) points out. One of the main difficulties for the translator may be lack of equivalence in the target language. As Baker (1992, p.68) writes "different languages express meanings using different linguistic means such as fixed expressions, idioms, words, etc. and it is very hard to find an equivalent of the same meaning and form in the target language". She adds that the main problem that causes problems is culture specific idioms or expressions is that "they are not necessarily untranslatable, however, they may refer to some specific item or event common to that particular culture, and therefore it is hard to translate such idiom as well".

Another difficulty that Baker (p.69) points out is "the use of the idiom similar in its form and meaning in different context in the target language". A lot of idioms are used in the literary texts in both English and Lithuanian languages. They mostly appear in dialogues, belong to the informal register and can be used both in their literal and idiomatic sense. To continue, Baker (p.69) adds that "idioms may be used in both literal and idiomatic sense at the same time". In this case, if the target-language idiom does not correspond to the source language idiom in its form and meaning, then it is hard to make a play of words and transfer the meaning. For example: *He had sufficient influence to be able to poke his nose into the private affairs of others where less aristocratic noses might have been speedily bloodied* (Baker, p.70).

Baker (1992) introduces the following strategies for translating idiomatic expressions: 1) using an idiom with the same meaning and form, 2) using an idiom with the similar meaning but different form, 3) by paraphrase, 4) by omission.

(1) *Translation by using an idiom with similar form and meaning in the target language.* It must convey roughly the same meaning and be of equivalent lexical items.

(2) *Translation by using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form.* In this case the lexical items of an idiom are not preserved; it is translated as a semantic equivalent:

(3) *Translation by paraphrase:* There are plenty of terms used to refer to this strategy: 'metaphor into non-metaphor' (Toury, 1995, p.82), 'communicative paraphrase' (Hervey and Higgins, 1992, p.32), 'reducing

metaphor to sense' (Newmark, 1988, p.109). Paraphrase is one of the most common strategies in the translation of idioms. As sometimes it is impossible to find the right equivalent or any idiom in the target language. Therefore, a translator can use translation by paraphrase. Using this kind of strategy, a translator transfers the meaning of an idiom using a single word or a group of words which roughly corresponds to the meaning of idiom but is not an idiom itself.

(4)*Translation by omission*: Toury (1995, p.82) calls it 'metaphor to 0', as this strategy implies that sometimes an idiom may be omitted, leaving no traces in the target language. According to Baker (1992, p.77), omission is allowed only in some cases: First, when there is no close equivalent in the target language; Secondly, when it is difficult to paraphrase; Finally, an idiom may be omitted for stylistic reasons.

Translating idioms literally means to preserve the form of the source idiom in the target language. The result is an expression which is grammatical but unidiomatic in the TL because it is based on the structure of a source idiom. In addition, it can be said that this strategy puts in the form of the SL idiom in the first place.

To sum up, exact equivalents if such phenomena exist in the target language for a SL idiom, can best serve the function of an original expression. Yet, it often happens that SL idioms do not have equivalents in the TL. In such cases, a translator has to choose appropriate strategy between paraphrasing, omission or literal translation. The choice of a particular strategy depends on several factors. These factors include the significance of the specific lexical items which make up the idiom as well as the appropriateness or inappropriateness of using idiomatic expressions in a given register in the target language (Baker, 1992, p.72).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Jordanian EFL University students encounter difficulties in translating idiomatic expressions. These difficulties usually result in poor translated texts. The dilemma is that students are not aware of these problems. This could be due to the lack of knowledge of translation strategies that help them to render the source expression in the target language. Several studies shed light on the difficulties students encounter in translating idioms into Arabic. Among these are the studies conducted by Hussein, Khanji, and Makhzoumi (2000), Abu-Afeefa (1987), Al-Hassan (2007) and Bataineh & Bataineh (2002). The results of these studies indicated that Jordanian universities students encountered difficulties in translating idioms into Arabic; the negative transfer plays a significant role in the translation of idioms, and that students have poor competence of different idioms. Since students are unaware of the strategies they use in translating idioms and encounter difficulties in translating them, this study is an attempt to shed light on these difficulties and tries to raise the teachers and students' awareness with these difficulties to hopefully overcome them in the process of translation.

### **Research Question**

This study aims at answering the following question:

What are the difficulties EFL Jordanian University students encounter in translating English idioms into Arabic?

### **Significance of the Study**

It is hoped that the findings of the study will provide the developers of translation courses, instructors of translation, and students of translation with information on the difficulties that students face in translating idioms. Instructors of translation may give these difficulties as well as difficult idioms more attention in the teaching- learning process. The students' awareness of these difficulties will hopefully be raised when these difficulties are introduced to them to overcome when translating idioms. As for the courses writers, it is hoped that more attention will be given to the idioms that are a source of difficulty for students such as opaque, unfamiliar, and peculiar idioms.

### **Operational Definitions of Terms**

**Idioms**: They are the fixed expressions presented in the translation test.

**Translating idioms**: In this paper, students are asked to translate the idioms which were included in the translation test from English into Arabic.

**Difficulties**: In this paper, they are the problems that students of translation, who participated in this study, face in translating idioms in the translation test.

### **Limitations of the Study**

1. The study addresses the difficulties encountered by EFL University students in translating idiomatic expressions; consequently, other linguistic systems like syntax, phonology, semantics and morphology are beyond the scope of the study.
2. The participants of the study are selected from Yarmouk University and the University of Jordan.. The findings can be generalized to similar contexts.

## Practical Studies

Hussein, Khanji, and Makhzoumi (2000) sought to find out the extent to which English major students have mastered English idioms. Besides, they tried to find out whether the type of idiom makes a difference as to the accuracy of translating them from Arabic into English. For this purpose, they developed a test consisting of 45 items (25 identical, 15 similar, and 15 different). Then, students were asked to translate the idioms from Arabic into English. The sample of the study consisted of 60 students, 30 of them enrolled in the M.A translation program and the others were English seniors. Subjects responses were listed and analyzed, and categorized to find out the percentage of correct responses for each item.

The results of the study showed that the correct translation of idioms was high for identical idioms in English and Arabic. The correct translation of idioms which were different in Arabic and English was relatively low, and ranged from 26% to 6%. The results also indicated that students have poor competence of different idioms. Negative transfer played a significant role in the translation of idiom. In translating the identical idioms, the percentage of correct responses was remarkably higher and ranged from 84% to 36%. This means that identical idioms were the easiest to translate by students. The researchers owed these results to the positive transfer and to the fact that English idioms have semantic counterparts in Arabic and identically worded. They also owed the students incapability of using English idioms correctly to the lack of pragmatic competence in contrast with grammatical competence. Students used negative transfer in addition to paraphrasing as strategies to translate idioms. They recommended that an attention must be paid to the study of English lexicon as well as idioms and conventionalized form which have to be taught systematically to students. Furthermore, a basis should be provided for deciding which idioms to be taught and to avoid infrequent, highly colloquial idioms with difficult vocabulary because students have difficulty in producing them correctly.

Bataineh, R, Bataineh, R (2002) investigated the problems that EFL graduate students at state universities face in translating idioms into Arabic. For this purpose, the researcher selected the participants of the study from both Yarmouk University and the University of Jordan. They were Jordanian students enrolled in the Department of English at both universities. Fourty five students who passed at least 15 credit hours of courses participated in the study. The researchers designed a test consisting of 45 items varied in their difficulty. Then, they marked the students' responses and classified the strategies used by them. The study revealed the problems arising from the students' translation of idioms into Arabic are the following: "The loss of some shade of meaning", misunderstanding the meaning of the sentence, disrupting the coherence of the text, and "unintelligibility through the use of literal translation".

The researchers attributed these results to several reasons such as the fact that idioms are culture-bound expressions, students unconsciousness of idioms, students' lack of competence, students unfamiliarity with idioms, and that students may be affected by carelessness and time pressure. In addition, the study revealed that the most problematic idioms for students were phrasal verbs, idioms with verbs, idioms with verb to be, idiomatic words, adjective and nouns in combination, and idioms with adverbs respectively. Based on the findings of the study, the researchers suggested several recommendations.

Al-Hassan (2007) investigated the ability of EFL learners to comprehend unfamiliar multiword units i.e., idioms, to assess the ability of Arab EFL majoring students in guessing the meanings of idioms, to identify the techniques the sample students used in translating idioms and the effectiveness of such techniques. To do so, he selected a sample of English major students at the Department of Language and Literature in Bahrain. He designed an inference task especially for the study to collect the data. The results revealed that the students were unable to come up with the correct translation in nearly half the number of items that contained unfamiliar idioms. On the other hand, the participants provided correct or partially correct translation in the rest of items. Also, the results showed that the students used a wide range of techniques such as idiom constituents, sentences, own mental images of idioms, metaphor, context, key words and wide guessing.

Badawi (2008) investigated EFL Saudi prospective teachers' ability to translate culture-bound expressions and their awareness of their translation strategies. In his study he aimed at finding out the ability of prospective teachers to translate culture bound expression and their awareness of translation strategies. For this purpose, he selected a sample of 43 fourth-year university students in Tabuk. He developed a translation test and a translation questionnaire which were validated and administered to participants during their final second term exam of the academic year 2007-2008. The participants were asked to translate 20 items and to respond to the translation awareness questionnaire by ticking the strategies they used for translating the test items. Results revealed that 86.05% of EFL Saudi students were unable to translate the test items. Also, he discovered that students' translation strategy awareness was poor as they got 40.24% and that cut-off level was 50%.

Kohil (2009) investigated the difficulties of finding an equivalent in translating English idiomatic phrasal verbs into Arabic. She aimed to explore how student's linguistic competence influences their translation process. Twenty five third year students in the English Department of the Mentouri University of Costantine were selected randomly to answer a written translation test. The results showed that the errors made by students are more than their correct answers. They also showed that students confront problems when translating

idiomatic phrasal verbs from English into Arabic. The main causes of the students' difficulties are related to their restricted linguistic competence, the literal meaning and their background knowledge. In light of these findings, pedagogical suggestions were provided by the researcher for translators as well as FL learners.

Mezmaz (2009) investigated the equivalence above word level. She dealt with the difficulties of non equivalence posed in translating English idioms into Arabic and vice versa. She sought to test how first year master students translate idioms from English into Arabic and vice versa, the methods used by students to find the suitable equivalent in the target language, the type of difficulties students of applied languages studies at Mentouri University encounter while translating idioms and tries to suggest solutions and identify strategies that may help to limit or avoid these difficulties. She developed a test consisting of twelve English idioms and ten Arabic ones. The test was given to the students to translate. The results of the study showed that there were potential problems in the process of translating idioms from English into Arabic and vice versa. Furthermore, the findings showed that the context of use helped a lot of students of English to guess the appropriate meanings of idioms. The results showed that the first strategy used by students was a word for word translation, paraphrasing, translation by cultural substitution. Students of English really found considerable difficulties in guessing the appropriate meanings of the idiomatic expressions under study. Their familiarity with English and especially with Arabic idioms is somehow low, and their ability to interpret unfamiliar idioms was limited.

Looking back into these studies, the researchers noticed that EFL students encounter difficulties in translating idioms into Arabic. These difficulties arise from the fact that idioms are culture-bound expressions which cannot be translated literally. Thus, this study attempts to investigate the difficulties that Jordanian EFL students encounter in translating English idioms into Arabic. It is hoped that the findings will provide the translators, students, and instructors with information on the difficulties students face when translating these idioms. Instructors of translation and the students' awareness of these difficulties will hopefully be raised. This study is different from the previous studies in the following aspects:

1. It encompasses the notion of utilizing students' strategies in teaching and learning translation in light of Baker's Taxonomy of translation strategies.

2. The current study adopts authentic texts that would hopefully be similar to the English texts that EFL majors would normally read outside the classroom, i.e., the text they would read for pleasure.

### **Methods and Procedures**

This section describes the methodology used in the present study: the participants, the instrument used for data collection, and the way in which data analysis was carried out.

### **Participants of the Study**

The participants of the study were selected purposefully. They were all M.A translation students at the University of Yarmouk and the University of Jordan enrolled in the Translation Program for the Academic year 2013/2014 and who passed at least 12 credit hours.

### **The Translation Test**

This primary tool in the study was designed by the researchers to explore the difficulties faced by students in translating English idioms into Arabic. It consists of 16 excerpts extracted from authentic written texts. Each excerpt presents an underlined idiom. After reading each excerpt, the participants are asked to translate the underlined expression into Arabic. Since the test aims at detecting the strategies used by EFL students in translating idioms into Arabic, the test presents an adequate number of short paragraphs, each containing one idiom. If the test consisted of a small number of paragraphs, and if the subjects were already familiar with most or all of the idioms presented in those paragraphs the detected difficulties would be based on the participants' translation of a small number of idioms. Furthermore, a small number of idioms would not be representative of the many idioms in English.

The researchers followed the semantic classification of idioms suggested by Fernando and Flavell (1981) since they are concerned with the efficiency of students in translating idioms with different categories in the spectrum of transparency of idioms. These four categories include opaque idioms, semi opaque idioms, semi transparent, and transparent idioms. The researchers, accordingly, based their selection of the idioms on these four categories. The final draft of the test consisted of 16 paragraphs with 16 idioms related to the classification in hand. Table 1 presents the distribution of the idioms in the test with regard to their semantic categories and the degree of transparency.

**Table 1: Distribution of Idioms in the Translation Test and their Categories**

Paragraph Number	Idiom	Category
1	Went out of the window	Semi- transparent
2	In hot water	Semi- transparent
3	Straight from the horse's mouth	Semi-opaque
4	You get butterflies in your stomach	Opaque
5	Face the music	Opaque
6	You scratch my back I'll scratch yours	Transparent
7	Once in a blue moon	Semi-opaque
8	Bury the hatchet	Opaque
9	Throwing in the towel	Semi- opaque
10	It's raining cats and dogs	Semi-transparent
11	Flogging a dead horse	Semi-opaque
12	Sugar the pill	Opaque
13	Ray of hope	Transparent
14	Black list	Transparent
15	Law of the jungle	Transparent
16	Break the ice	Semi – transparent

To find a sample of authentic texts, each containing a post-lexical level idiom, a master list of 30 modern English idioms were selected from two dictionaries, Collins Cobuild Dictionary of Idioms (CCDI, 2002) and the online edition of Cambridge International Dictionary of Idioms (CIDI,2005). To be included in the corpus, the texts must have met the following criteria:

1. The text must be authentic, not contrived. It is not written for especially non native speakers of English or as a simplified version of an original text. Furthermore, the text is not introduced in a textbook in idioms or in a book of linguistics where a discussion of the idioms meaning or idioms in general is presented.
2. The language of the text should not be described as technical or that would require special knowledge in a particular field.
3. The language of the text should not be described as slang, or incomprehensible, or idiosyncratic.
4. The text must be contemporary. All the texts used in the final draft of the test were written between 2000 and 2011. The text must be at least a paragraph and not a sentence or a phrase.
5. The text must be culturally appropriate.
6. The text is not culture- specific.
7. The idiom, presented in the text is not used as a title, or a name of website, or the like.
8. The idiom, presented in the text is not used as a title, or a name of website, or the like.

#### **Validity of the Translation Test**

In order to establish the validity of the translation test and to ensure that the texts and the idioms are appropriate for the students' language proficiency level, the draft test, consisting of 30 items was submitted to a panel of 10 Jordanian EFL instructors at both universities who were professors at the Department of English Language and Literature and the Department of Translation. The instructors also received a letter containing the objectives of the research and the translation test as well as the excerpts that are included in the test.

#### **Reliability of the Translation Test**

To establish the reliability of the test, it was piloted twice to 30 students, who did not participate in the study at both universities under investigation, then it was modified accordingly; i.e the number of items in the tests was reduced into 20 items instead of 30. The results were corrected and studied by the researchers and a construct validity as well as item discrimination was carried out Then, stability index was calculated using Kurder Richardson Index. The value was 91%. After two weeks from the first test, the test was repeated to establish its reliability using Intra- rator Pearson Correlation which was valued as 0. 87%.

#### **Data Analysis**

The test was a very important tool and a source of rich information for the researchers since it reflects students' efficiency in translating idioms, the strategies they resort to, as well as the difficulty they encountered in translating them. After they conducted the test, the researchers read the translated papers of 90 students for many times and took notes. After that, the researchers developed a content analysis sheet that was modified many

times in line with the students' varied responses, and the jury remarks. The judgment of students' versions acceptability ought to be approved by professional translation professors. To achieve inter-rater reliability of the content analysis sheet, the researchers asked a colleague who has experience in teaching translation to analyze the answers. The reliability coefficient was 97% which is considered high and acceptable.

For statistical purposes, the rating of students' responses was reduced into two levels: firstly, unacceptable score which included failure to translate and incomprehensible translation, and secondly, the acceptable score which included the comprehensible translation and correct translation. The observed frequencies and the expected frequencies per each strategy were calculated. Using Chi-Square Test of Independence, the researchers verified the existence of significant differences between the expected and observed frequencies of the strategies employed by students according to the case of translation acceptable/unacceptable; the percentages of strategies were calculated to identify the difficulty index of the idioms and the adjusted standardized residual was calculated to explore the efficient strategies in translating each category of these idioms.

### Findings of the Study

The observed and expected frequencies were calculated for both acceptable and unacceptable strategies according to the type of idiom. Then,  $\chi^2$  test of independence was carried out to verify if there were significant differences between the expected and observed frequencies of the strategies according to the case of the translation and according to the type of idioms. In light of the results, the percentages for the strategies were calculated to explore the degree of difficulty in translating different types of idioms. Furthermore, the adjusted residual to find out the strategies that have an effective role in translating idioms into Arabic according to the type of idiom was calculated followed by the total percentages for each strategy used in the case of acceptable translation to detect the effectiveness of the used strategy according to the type of idiom. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 shows the following results:

- A. In case of opaque idioms, there are significant differences at  $\alpha = 0.05$  between the observed and expected frequencies of the strategies used by students which indicates that the process of translating opaque idioms can be described as a difficult one with a difficulty index value of 0.472. The Table also shows that the most used strategies in translating these idioms are paraphrasing, literal translation, and cultural substitution respectively.
- B. In the case of Semi- opaque idioms, there are significant differences at  $\alpha = 0.05$  between the observed and expected frequencies of the strategies used by students which indicates that the process of translating these idioms can be described an easy one with a moderate difficulty index value of 0.742. Furthermore, the table shows that the most used strategies in translating these idioms are paraphrasing, literal translation, cultural substitution, and translation by an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form respectively.
- C. In the case of Semi-transparent idioms, there are significant differences at  $\alpha = 0.05$  between the observed and expected frequencies of the strategies used by students. This indicates that the process of translating these idioms can be described an easy one with a high difficulty index value of 0.881. Furthermore, Table 2 shows that the most used strategies in translating these idioms are paraphrasing followed by literal translation.
- D. In the case of Transparent idioms, there are significant differences at  $\alpha = 0.05$  between the observed and expected frequencies which indicates that the process of translating these idioms can be described an easy one with a difficulty index value of 0.889. Furthermore, Table 9 shows that the most used strategies in translating transparent idioms are literal translation followed by paraphrasing.

**Table 2: The Results of  $\chi^2$  Test of the Observed and Expected Frequencies for the Strategies Used by Students in Translating Idioms According to the Case of Translation for Each Type of Idiom**

Phrases Type	Translation Acceptance	Statistics	Used Strategies						Total
			Translation idiom meaning dissimilar form	Paraphrasing	Cultural substitution	Literal translation	Avoidance	Guessing	
Opaque	Unacceptable	Observed Count					128	62	190
		Expected Count	0.5	78.1	3.7	7.4	67.6	32.7	190.0
		% within translation Acceptance	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	67.4	32.6	100.0
		% of Total	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	35.6	17.2	52.8
		Adjusted Residual	-1.06	-16.76	-2.82	-4.03	13.33	8.19	
	Acceptable	Observed Count	1	148	7	14			170
		Expected Count	0.5	69.9	3.3	6.6	60.4	29.3	170.0
		% within translation Acceptance	0.6	87.1	4.1	8.2	0.0	0.0	100.0
		% of Total	0.3	41.1	1.9	3.9	0.0	0.0	47.2
		Adjusted Residual	1.06	<b>16.76</b>	<b>2.82</b>	<b>4.03</b>	-13.33	-8.19	
	Total	Observed Count	1	148	7	14	128	62	360
		Expected Count	1.0	148.0	7.0	14.0	128.0	62.0	360.0
% within translation Acceptance		0.3	41.1	1.9	3.9	35.6	17.2	100.0	
% of Total		0.3	41.1	1.9	3.9	35.6	17.2	100.0	
Semi-Opaque	Unacceptable	Observed Count					69	24	93
		Expected Count	4.4	54.0	2.8	7.8	17.8	6.2	93.0
		% within translation Acceptance	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	74.2	25.8	100.0
		% of Total	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	19.2	6.7	25.8
		Adjusted Residual	-2.49	-13.17	-1.99	-3.38	15.65	8.59	
	Acceptable	Observed Count	17	209	11	30			267
		Expected Count	12.6	155.0	8.2	22.3	51.2	17.8	267.0
		% within translation Acceptance	6.4	78.3	4.1	11.2	0.0	0.0	100.0
		% of Total	4.7	58.1	3.1	8.3	0.0	0.0	74.2
		Adjusted Residual	<b>2.49</b>	<b>13.17</b>	<b>1.99</b>	<b>3.38</b>	-15.65	-8.59	
	Total	Observed Count	17	209	11	30	69	24	360
		Expected Count	17.0	209.0	11.0	30.0	69.0	24.0	360.0
% within translation Acceptance		4.7	58.1	3.1	8.3	19.2	6.7	100.0	
% of Total		4.7	58.1	3.1	8.3	19.2	6.7	100.0	
Semi-Transparent	Unacceptable	Observed Count					29	14	43
		Expected Count		25.9	2.9	9.1	3.5	1.7	43.0
		% within translation Acceptance		0.0	0.0	0.0	67.4	32.6	100.0
		% of Total		0.0	0.0	0.0	8.1	3.9	11.9
		Adjusted Residual		-8.61	-1.87	-3.61	15.25	10.36	
	Acceptable	Observed Count	217	24	76				317
		Expected Count	191.1	21.1	66.9	25.5	12.3		317.0
		% within translation Acceptance	68.5	7.6	24.0	0.0	0.0		100.0
		% of Total	60.3	6.7	21.1	0.0	0.0		88.1
		Adjusted Residual		<b>8.61</b>	<b>1.87</b>	<b>3.61</b>	-15.25	-10.36	
	Total	Observed Count	217	24	76	29	14		360
		Expected Count	217.0	24.0	76.0	29.0	14.0		360.0
% within translation Acceptance		60.3	6.7	21.1	8.1	3.9		100.0	
% of Total		60.3	6.7	21.1	8.1	3.9		100.0	
Transparent	Unacceptable	Observed Count					26	14	40
		Expected Count		15.7	1.3	18.6	2.9	1.6	40.0
		% within translation Acceptance		0.0	0.0	0.0	65.0	35.0	100.0
		% of Total		0.0	0.0	0.0	7.2	3.9	11.1
		Adjusted Residual		-5.38	-1.25	-6.24	14.97	10.79	
	Acceptable	Observed Count	141	12	167				320
		Expected Count	125.3	10.7	148.4	23.1	12.4		320.0
		% within translation Acceptance	44.1	3.8	52.2	0.0	0.0		100.0
		% of Total	39.2	3.3	46.4	0.0	0.0		88.9
		Adjusted Residual		<b>5.38</b>	<b>1.25</b>	<b>6.24</b>	-14.97	-10.79	
	Total	Observed Count	141	12	167	26	14		360
		Expected Count	141.0	12.0	167.0	26.0	14.0		360.0
% within translation Acceptance		39.2	3.3	46.4	7.2	3.9		100.0	
% of Total		39.2	3.3	46.4	7.2	3.9		100.0	
Classification		Computed $\chi^2$		Df		Sig.			
Opaque		<b>360.000</b>		5		0.000			
Semi-Opaque		<b>360.000</b>		5		0.000			
Semi-transparent		<b>360.000</b>		4		0.000			
Transparent		<b>360.000</b>		4		0.000			

## Discussion of the Findings

The findings of the study indicated that M.A students seem to have difficulty in translating opaque and semi-opaque idioms from contexts through reading authentic texts. While the difficulty index value for the acceptable translation was 0.472, it was 52.8 for the unacceptable ones. This means that students demonstrate difficulties in translating opaque idioms from English into Arabic. Students resort to use paraphrasing as a strategy to give the meaning of these idioms. For instance, in translating the idiom *you get butterflies in your stomach*, almost all students who provided acceptable translation paraphrased it trying to give the meaning as 'indama yakunu mutawattiran, yash'uru bittawatturin, yash'uru bilqalaq walirtibak, ashu'ur bilqalaq walkhawfi shadid (عندما يكون متوترا يشعر بتوتر، يشعر بالقلق والارتباك، أشعر بالقلق والخوف الشديد). In translating the opaque idiom *bury the hatchet*, it appears that students also struggled to give the right meaning. They translated it as "iqafilharb, yunhiniza', yafudduniza', yada'ulkhusoumah, ya'umussalam (إيقاف الحرب، ينهي النزاع، يفض النزاع، يدع الخصومة، يعم السلام).

Students, also face difficulty in translating semi-opaque idioms. The difficulty index value for the acceptable translation was 0.742 compared to 25.8 in the case of unacceptable translation of the idioms of the same category. This, in turn, indicates that students face a moderate difficulty level in translating semi-opaque idioms. Students with acceptable translation on semi-opaque idioms tried to give the meaning using paraphrasing. For instance, they translated the idiom *straight from the horse's mouth* as min masdarin mas'ul minal masdar, mubasharah minal masdar, min afwahil ma'niyyin ((من مصدر مسؤل، مباشرة من المصدر، من أفواه المعنيين). Few students were able to give a functional equivalent in the target language and translated it as min ra'sinab' (من رأس النبع). Some students provided a literal translation for this idiom and translated it as min famil hissana (من الفم الحصان).

The researchers attributed these findings to the degree of idiom semantic transparency, the richness or poorness of the contextual clues that are related to the meaning of a given idiom in the translation test, the students' language proficiency in general and their vocabulary span in particular. The degree of idiomaticity has also an important impact on the students' familiarity with English idioms since their familiarity with idioms vary from one to another. For example, some students provided sometimes the right answer and in other circumstances they provided the wrong one. This indicates that they are not familiar with idioms.

There are idioms in which the lexical meaning can be easily understood because they are transparent. These idioms make the task easier for students to select the right answer, since they can infer the meaning from the constituent parts of the idiom. For instance, in translating the idiom *break the ice*, students translated it literally as 'yaksiruj jalid' and some of them paraphrased it as 'yaksiru hajjassamt', 'kasrij jumdi lil bidi bilhadith', 'yuzilulhajj, and yaksiru haji zattawattur' (كسر الجمود لبدء الحديث، يكسر حاجز الصمت،). This indicates that students are already familiar with this idiom and they translated it functionally using a cultural substitution.

The degree of students' comprehensibility of the context may play an important role in choosing the correct idiom. For instance, in paragraph number 5, in translating the idiom *You get butterflies in your stomach* students misunderstood the context, that is why they all gave the wrong answer. The fact that the percentage of acceptable translations of English idioms into Arabic is higher than the unacceptable ones proves that many students overcome the difficulties of translating English idioms by using some strategies. Using these strategies may help students to give suitable or acceptable translations.

Difficulties, according to the students' translation were: Finding the right equivalent in Arabic, unfamiliarity with idioms, infrequently used idioms, ignoring the use of culture specific idiom, unfamiliarity with the target language culture, the constituent words of idioms, and ignorance of the occasion behind a given idiom in English. The difficulty lies in finding the right equivalent in the first place, and the constituent words of the idioms do not help them in guessing its meaning since they do not contribute to the meaning of a given idiom especially in opaque and semi opaque ones. The results indicated that students face difficulties in translating the unfamiliar idioms, culture-bound idioms, and opaque idioms. In addition, idioms with different images, peculiar idioms, and lengthy idioms form a source of difficulty for students. As for students who were able to provide acceptable translations of the given idioms, few of them could be able to provide the functional equivalent, the matter which the researcher may attribute to the poor pragmatic competence of students. This is evidenced by the students' use of paraphrasing as a strategy to provide the ideational meaning followed by the use of formal equivalence. This in turn, indicates that students demonstrated difficulty in rendering English idioms into their Arabic cultural equivalents.

English and Arabic are two different languages with different cultures. In addition, most idioms are culture-bound expressions and peculiar to a given language and hence, what has a certain meaning in the source language does not necessarily have an equivalent in the target language. This makes the translation of idioms a difficult task for students. While instructors prefer that their students give an equivalent idiom in the target culture, it seems from the findings of the study that this is difficult for students to do because English and Arabic are culturally and linguistically different. Since not all students are aware of these differences, translating idioms becomes a tiring task for them in particular and for the translators in general because they have to be aware of the details of the two languages. Shunnaq (1993) writes:



Arabic and English are two languages which may be said to have sharply contrasting cultural backgrounds. Hence, a translator dealing with these languages should be both bilingual as well as bicultural ... in numerous cases it is extremely difficult not only to find an appropriate equivalence, but even to find an equivalence at all (p.8).

These findings are consistent with those achieved in most previous studies carried out by researchers such as Abu Irujo (1984), Hussein, Khanji, and Makhzoumi (2000), Badawi (2008), Mezmaz (2009) and Kohil (2009). The findings of these studies showed that the easy idioms for students to translate were the transparent (identical) idioms followed by semi transparent (similar) then, opaque and semi opaque (different) idioms which scored the lowest percentages in the process of translating into Arabic. Also, the results of the previous studies showed that students have limited pragmatic competence indicated by their lack of the suitable cultural equivalent in the case of opaque and semi opaque idioms compared to transparent and semi transparent idioms in which students were able to render them easily into Arabic and this could be attributed to the fact that transparent idioms have semantic counterparts in Arabic compared to the other two categories of idioms.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

It seems that students' proficiency in translating culture-bound idioms is limited. Also, one may conclude that the variety in students' strategies is a reflection of the differences in students' linguistic and pragmatic competence and the degree of their familiarity with these idioms. It seems that EFL students suffer to find the suitable equivalent in Arabic, the matter which is clear in their lack of using the right acceptable equivalent when translating idioms of post-lexical level. This may be attributed to the fact that they are not exposed to the culture of the target language, the lack of familiarity with the target language cultural expressions, and the gap existing between the two cultures. One also might conclude that English idioms and their teaching do not receive much attention in the translation and English Language Programs. Based on the findings of the study, the researchers suggest that EFL instructors should encourage their students to translate the meaning of idioms during reading, but direct teaching of idioms and explicit idioms learning (e.g. learning the meaning of an idiom from a dictionary) should go hand in hand with such encouragement. In addition, EFL instructors should take into account the teaching of translating idioms to their students in hand with the teaching of translation strategies. Furthermore, EFL translation textbooks should present more idioms to EFL translation students with a focus on exposing students to the target language culture. Students should study English/ Arabic specific course in idioms and culture as a prerequisite course to the translation courses.

### References

- Abu-Afeefa, R. (1987). Transfer in the acquisition of English idioms by Jordanian University students. Unpublished M.A Thesis. Yarmouk University, Irbid, Jordan
- Al-Hassan, H. (2007). In guessing the meaning of idioms: Efficiency and techniques. Unpublished M.A Thesis, University of Bahrain. Retrieved on 15<sup>th</sup> Oct, 2012 from <http://search.proquest.com.ezlibrary.ju.edu.jo/docview/304773490?accountid=27719>
- Alrishan, A., Smadi, O. (2015). Strategies Used by Jordanian EFL University Graduate Students in Translating Idioms into Arabic. *Journal of Education and Practice*. 6,(6),45-55.
- Badawi, M. (2008). Investigating EFL prospective teachers' ability to translate culture-bound expressions. University of Tabuk. Retrieved on 11<sup>th</sup> Nov, 2012 from <http://www.eric.ed.gov>
- Baker, M. (1992). In other words: A course book on translation. London: Routledge.
- Bataineh, R; Bataineh, R (2002). The Difficulties Jordanian Graduate Learners of English as a Second Language Face When Translating English Idioms into Arabic. *RASK: internationalt tidsskrift for sprog og kommunikation* 16: 33-83.
- Fernando, C., & Flavelle, R. (1981). On idiom: Critical views and perspectives. Exeter: Exeter University Press.
- Hervey, S., & Higgins, I. (1992). Thinking translation: A course in translation method. New York: Routledge.
- Hussein, R., Khanji, R., & Makhzoumi, K. (2000). Idioms: Transfer or what?. *Language and Translation Journal*, 12, 23-34, King Saud University.
- Irujo, S. (1984). The effect of transfer on the acquisition of idioms in a second language. Unpublished doctoral Dissertation. Boston University. Retrieved on 12<sup>th</sup> Nov, 2012 from <http://search.proquest.com.ezlibrary.ju.edu.jo/docview/303325315?accountid=27719>
- Kohil, H. (2009). Investigating Problems in Translating English Idiomatic Phrasal Verbs into Arabic. M.A Thesis. Mentouri University of Costantine, Algeria.
- Mezmaz, M. (2009). Problems of Idioms in Translation. Unpublished M.A Thesis. Mentouri University of Costantine, Algeria.
- Newmark, P. (1988). A textbook of translation. London: Prentice Hall International.
- Shunnaq, A. (1993). Lexical Incongruence in Arabic –English Translation Due to Emotiveness in Arabic.

- turjuman, 2, (2), 37-63.
- Toury, G. (1995). *Descriptive translation studies and beyond*. Amsterdam: Benjamins.
- University of Birmingham.(2002). *Collins cobuild dictionary of idioms*. London: Harper Collins.
- University of Cambridge. (2005). *Cambridge International Dictionary of Idioms*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

The IISTE is a pioneer in the Open-Access hosting service and academic event management. The aim of the firm is Accelerating Global Knowledge Sharing.

More information about the firm can be found on the homepage:

<http://www.iiste.org>

### CALL FOR JOURNAL PAPERS

There are more than 30 peer-reviewed academic journals hosted under the hosting platform.

**Prospective authors of journals can find the submission instruction on the following page:** <http://www.iiste.org/journals/> All the journals articles are available online to the readers all over the world without financial, legal, or technical barriers other than those inseparable from gaining access to the internet itself. Paper version of the journals is also available upon request of readers and authors.

### MORE RESOURCES

Book publication information: <http://www.iiste.org/book/>

Academic conference: <http://www.iiste.org/conference/upcoming-conferences-call-for-paper/>

### IISTE Knowledge Sharing Partners

EBSCO, Index Copernicus, Ulrich's Periodicals Directory, JournalTOCS, PKP Open Archives Harvester, Bielefeld Academic Search Engine, Elektronische Zeitschriftenbibliothek EZB, Open J-Gate, OCLC WorldCat, Universe Digital Library, NewJour, Google Scholar

